

PS3 | Xbox 360 | Revolution | PS2 | GC | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro




eMag

Whether your opinion is one of overwhelming excitement or 'about time too' eye-rolling, the fact remains: the PSP is finally here. Forget that some of us have been privy to its pleasures for nearly a year – although no doubt a few people will be slightly disappointed that producing one from your pocket on a bus or train will no longer draw the gawps and wide-eyed attention it may have done in the past.

Despite the good news, however, we're concerned. Not about the time it's taken for the PSP to arrive on our shores, but more the strong-arm tactics being employed by Sony against importers of the handheld. Import gaming is the lifeblood of what many of us, as dedicated gamers, believe in, and yet Sony is doing its best to take that away. Worse still, any success it has in the courts creates a precedent that could potentially lead the way for stopping imports altogether – an unimaginable prospect. We've got no issue with Sony reshaping the future of videogaming – it did it with the PSone, after all – but when it's a future without importing? Well, it hardly bears thinking about.

Martin Mathers
Editor




0:36
1P 3 POWER



games tm
PLAYER 1

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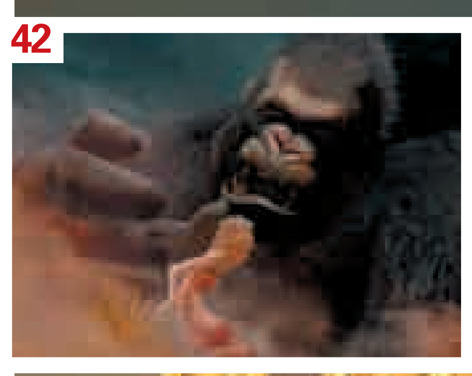
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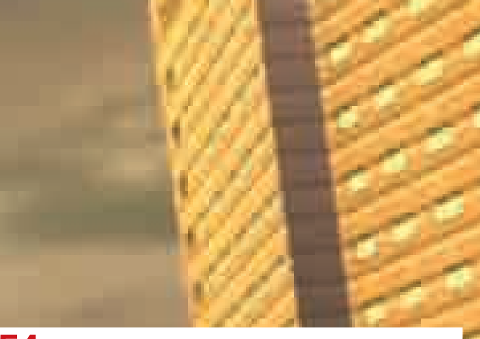
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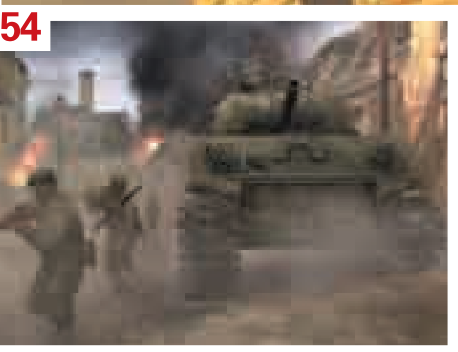
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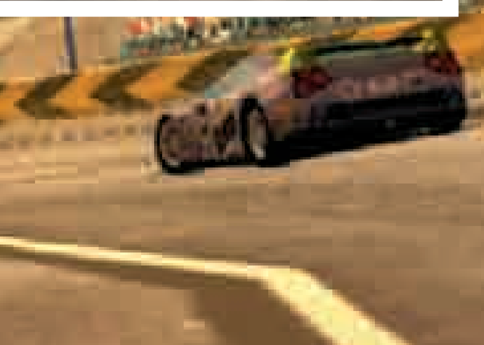
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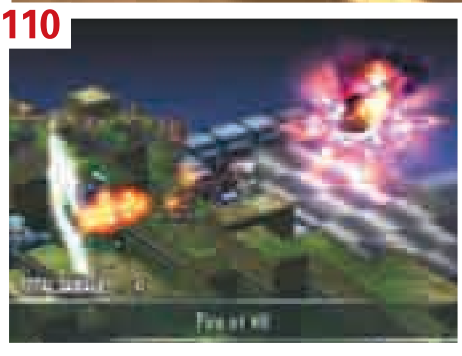
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Credit cards at the ready – the PlayStation Portable is here, complete with a full line-up of launch titles. games™ details the best (and worst) of the bunch.

116 PSP: Review Special

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

FRINGE BEN

EDINBURGH INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT FESTIVAL PROVES TO BE A HIT

New name, new premises and what appears to be the new face of large-scale gaming events for the UK – this year's Edinburgh Interactive Entertainment Festival was definitely a success. The event (which, following the demise of Games Stars Live, is now only one of two game-based consumer shows in the UK) saw people turn up in their droves to experience the many delights on offer, with industry figures and consumers showing their support.

Working around the theme of progression, this year's conferences covered topics from genre stagnation to the battle between consoles and television programmes in the home. Indeed, progression, or a lack thereof, was a central concern amongst the organisers of the EIEF. Though displaying videogames alongside more accepted forms of art in the context of the Edinburgh Festival is certainly a step forward, it's hardly a giant leap in the continuing battle for wider recognition that the games industry has been fighting for a number of years. "We're in a very early stage in the development of the industry," said Fred Hasson, the EIEF's programme director. "I originated this festival with an ambition to help educate people outside the industry who were interested in [its] potential."

Happily, and in keeping with this attitude, a wide selection of consumer events complemented the industry conferences, including the Go Play Games show. While the conferences proved popular, Go Play Games (which ran alongside the industry events) managed to draw the biggest crowds – all manner of long-awaited titles (including Nintendo's now delayed *Zelda: Twilight Princess*) were made available to the public, occasionally causing lengthy queues. Despite the waiting, the mood was incredibly positive among those attending.

The most interesting thing at the show, however, was arguably the Dare To Be Digital competition, run by the

"THE EVENT IS **A UNIQUE SPOTLIGHT** ON THE INDUSTRY WHERE **INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC MIX"**

FRED HASSON, PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, EIEF

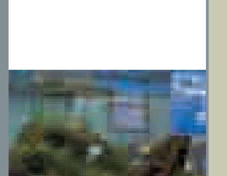
EFITS

University of Abertay Dundee. Students on art and game development courses across the country were challenged to make a game over their summer break, advised by industry professionals. The results of the competition were both impressive and, on occasion, brilliantly odd, as you'll see from our detailed look at the show favourites (see right).

Undoubtedly, this year's EIEF achieved a good mix of industry and gamer participation and certainly upped its presence as an event – something that will stand it in good stead for the years to come. "The conference was a success," said Hasson. "The event is a unique spotlight on the industry where industry and public mix – it is a place where initiates to the industry can feel welcomed and can learn about it, where serious games and educational issues can be aired, where new ideas can be initiated." We're inclined to agree – in the absence of a big British industry event, the EIEF has made its mark.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

THE DARE TO BE DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE PRODUCED SOME EXCELLENT PROJECTS. WE LIKE THESE…



Surely this is the ideal game for those 'tired and emotional' moments?

FISHISM

This was judged the winning entry at the EIEF, although we slightly preferred *Coda Chain*. Developed by team Gene Therapy, *Fishism*'s lavish and relaxing visuals almost certainly helped cement its place on the top of the winners' podium. The game provides the player with a virtual tank in which to watch, breed and look after fish. *The Sims* was cited as an influence, although *Fishism*'s relaxed atmosphere is considerably different from *The Sims*' busy gameplay. The really astounding thing about *Fishism* is the graphical standard – it honestly looks like a professional product, and the team deserve the accolade of winning the EIEF award.



Coda Chain is like an party conga line but without the shameful drunkenness.

CODA CHAIN

We're enormous fans of rhythm-action titles, and though *Coda Chain* is more *Rez* than *Amplitude* its dynamic music sets it apart from the crowd. The in-game authorities have placed a ban on all music and the player must lead the revolution via a unique chain system. Although you start off on your own, whistling an incredibly catchy tune, you'll soon be joined by other characters and form a chain with them. Each character you collect adds a different track to the music, meaning that as characters join the chain you build up an increasingly complex musical score. Excellent. Much to our delight, *Coda Chain*'s development team, Missing Link, won an award at the separate University of Abertay judging held shortly after the festival.



Start playing on the bus, finish your game when you get home. Great idea.

CONSPIRACY: CORPORATE WARFARE

Conspiracy, unlike most other entries, is playable on a mobile phone – however, it also runs on a PC, meaning that you can start a game on your phone while you're out and continue on your PC when you get home. Described as a 'cross-platform strategy game' by its development team, Evil Machines, it takes place in the near future when corporations fight each other for control of the world. It's slightly reminiscent of *Laser Squad Nemesis* in its tactical battling and multiplayer aspects and it offers the player the chance to play against friends or in organised competitions. *Conspiracy* won the Technical Excellence award at the Abertay judgement due to its cross-platform elements. Considering the complexity of this feature, it's well deserved praise.

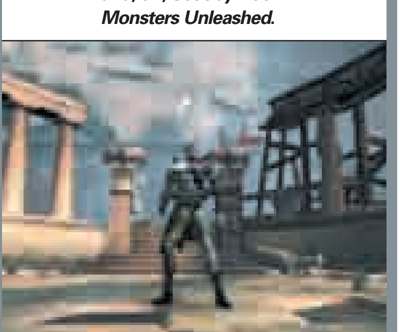
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GODS AND MONSTERS

Universal Studios has snapped up the movie rights to Sony's ultra-violent PS2 action title *God Of War*, according to movie trade magazine *Variety*. It joins *Doom* and *Silent Hill* on the list of adult-themed games currently getting the big-screen treatment, but no-one's saying whether it will be watered down for a box office-friendly PG-13 rating. *God Of War* currently has no writers, director or cast, but will be produced by Charles Roven, the man behind *Batman Begins* and, uh, *Scooby Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*.





THE WHITE STUFF

As if the PSP didn't look lovely enough, lucky Japanese gamers will get their hands on a limited edition white version on 15 September in a value pack for ¥26,040 (£132). Sony seems to be taking a leaf out of Nintendo's book by stating that this will be the first in a series of colours, each with matching accessories. There's been no word yet on whether it will see a Western release, but the popularity of coloured Game Boys and limited edition PS2s should make it a certainty.



■ Nintendo's Revolution is still under wraps – will the Tokyo Game Show yield anything?

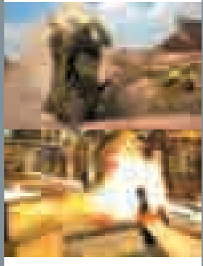
■ Microsoft's pricing scheme is solid, but we doubt many gamers will pick the low-cost option.

NEXT ESTIMATION, MORE LIKE

RUMOURS ABOUND AS TOMORROW'S HARDWARE LOOMS



■ Seriously, is that in-game footage? Chinny reck-on.



■ Zombie death looks to be where it's at for Xbox 360.



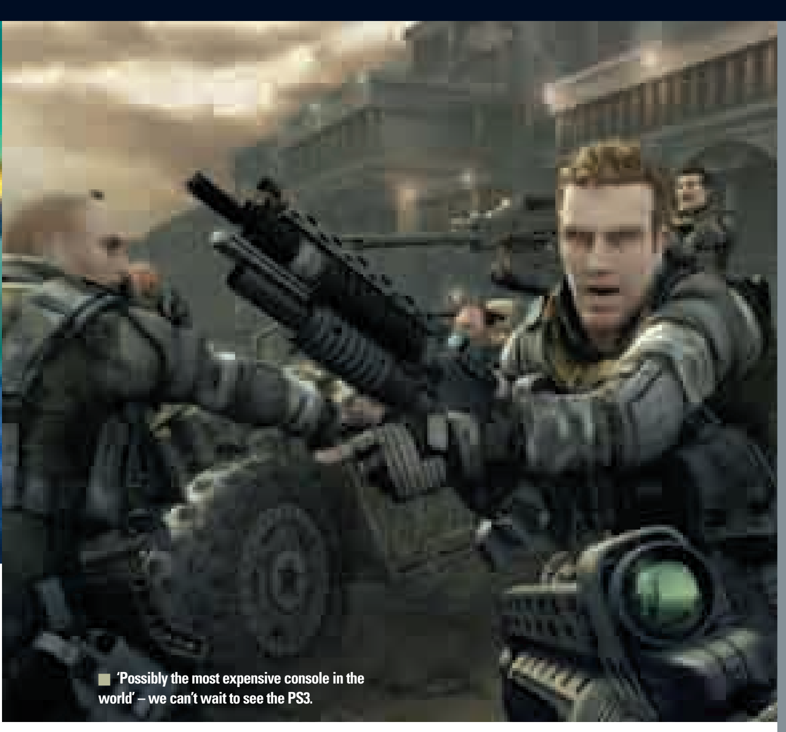
There's nothing quite so exciting for a hardened gamer as hearing a tantalising slice of next-generation information that sends your brain racing. Nothing, perhaps, except the thrill of having the 'information' you just made up reported as fact and sold to millions of gamers via the magic of the internet. Thanks, the internet.

Latest in the line of questionable statements to be debunked are the many facts and figures appearing on gaming forums for Nintendo's next console. It's amazing how quickly throwaway comments become fact on the world wide web – a post on Newgrounds' message boards from a user who claimed to have seen the Revolution controller and broke the news of the console being renamed 'Nintendo RS' was soon being reported as news on a number of fan sites. But it wasn't long before the originator came clean and the ruse was exposed for the web of Photoshop trickery and lies that it was.

Similarly, you may have seen the alleged tech demo images from Japan, again quickly revealed to be a hoax. Several images were even found to be pinched directly from rendering software company Splutterfish's website. So much for that, then. Nintendo's Revolution is still the most cloaked in secrecy of the three next-gen machines (largely due to it being expected to be the last out of the gates) but perhaps this month's Tokyo Game Show will reveal a few new titbits.

But it isn't always the internet's fault. Hell, it's not always outright lies – in some cases, we actually get hard facts. Shortly before going to press, Microsoft actually announced UK prices for two separate Xbox 360 SKUs, as predicted by several analysts. The cheapest of these will come in at £209.99, for which you'll get just the machine and a single controller. Again, as was suggested, this price won't include the hard drive that has made the original Xbox so popular. But for an extra £70 Microsoft will be providing a bundle of extra goodies. Your 7,000 pence will get you a 20Gb hard drive, a headset, a component cable, a media remote and Silver Live subscription – not bad when you consider the HDD on its own would set you back just a single penny less if bought separately.

This premium package will represent great value and will no doubt be a popular choice among established gamers. Microsoft seems pretty happy with it, too. "The sheer entertainment value of Xbox 360 cannot be overstated," said Robbie Bach, Microsoft's chief Xbox officer. "While the system has the muscle to power awe-inspiring graphics, audio and online play, it's also got the intelligence to serve as a one-of-a-kind entertainment device that plays CDs,



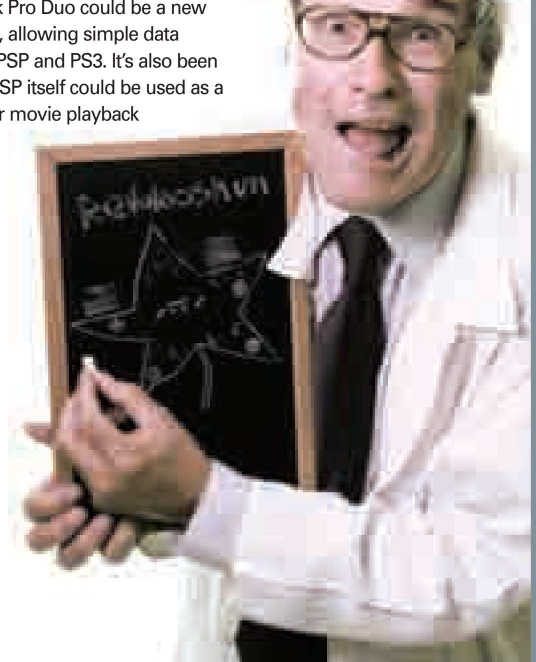
'Possibly the most expensive console in the world' – we can't wait to see the PS3.

"THERE'S THE SUGGESTION THAT **MEMORY STICK PRO DUO COULD BE A NEW STANDARD** FOR SONY, ALLOWING SIMPLE **DATA TRANSFER BETWEEN PSP AND PS3"**

DVDs, MP3s and digital content from an array of devices."

As for Sony's newest home console, US publication *PSM* has printed a slew of anonymously sourced facts. Many of these are pretty much common sense – the incompatibility of existing peripherals is a given based on the absence of any ports on the console, as is the suggestion that existing memory cards will be a thing of the past. Slightly more interesting is the suggestion that Memory Stick Pro Duo could be a new standard for Sony, allowing simple data transfer between PSP and PS3. It's also been mooted that the PSP itself could be used as a Wi-Fi controller for movie playback and media management.

So there you have it – a few more morsels of next-gen knowledge. Expect more solid facts in the wake of the Tokyo Game Show and X05 (planned for October) but for now, keep your pinch of salt handy.



RUMOUR CONTROL

With all this speculation going around, we feel a little left out. To that end, here are a few 'facts' of our own – expect to see them reported as fact on well-known rumour-mongering games sites in the next few hours.

- **The Revolution will be made of coloured sponge – who needs the HD era when you have the first bath-ready console? Mario's appearance in every title released will also be compulsory.**
- **Sony is designing a special chip for the PlayStation3 to make it answer to the name Claude with a little wave. It is also alleged to be the first console capable of apathy.**
- **The Xbox 360 launch will be delayed until Boxing Day, the 360th day of the year, in the worst marketing stunt since Acclaim folded. Bill Gates is apparently in talks with Christian leaders to get Christmas itself delayed accordingly to maximise sales.**

All information provided by 'anonymous independent analysts', not just made up. Honest.



NOT ANOTHER...

ROCKSTAR WITCH HUNT

MOB FORMS AROUND BULLY; ROCKSTAR PLEADS INNOCENCE

Grand Theft Auto* creator Rockstar has once again come under fire from another interest group that seems to be missing the point slightly. This time, though, it's not the crime-filled capers of *Grand Theft Auto* in the stocks; no, it's forthcoming release *Bully* that's responsible for making parents see red this month. Worried that the game might be a bad influence on kids who probably shouldn't be playing it in first place (like much of Rockstar's output, *Bully* is likely to carry a high age rating) anti-bullying web site Bullying Online is taking a stand against the school-based title.

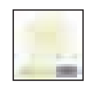
Speaking to gamesindustry.biz, Bullying Online director Liz Carnell gave some choice quotes. "As most youngsters rely on their parents for pocket money, if parents don't like violent games then ultimately the games industry may finds it's shot itself in the foot," she said. Rockstar's only retort so far is that the game will be "no worse than *Just William*" – a strange comment given the likelihood of the game receiving an adult certificate. But either way, it's not as though *Bully* will be the game that introduces kids to the concept of kicking other children up the ass.

Rockstar was apparently unmoved by a march on its Manhattan HQ last month by a group calling themselves the Peaceoholics that wanted to protest against the company's output. Banners such as 'Put the cuffs on Rockstar, not youth' failed to elicit an official response from the developer.



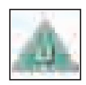
Trousers down, boy – it's six of the best for you…

Data Stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



PLUG AND PLAY
A recent presentation by Microsoft has revealed that a keyboard peripheral will be available for the Xbox 360. However, the keyboard is actually of the miniature variety and will slot into the bottom of the controller, allowing for text messages and chat during Live play. Looking to be about the same size as the one found on a Blackberry, it will fit in between the 'arms' of the 360's joypad. The decision marks a change of tune for Microsoft; the company had deliberately avoided developing a keyboard for the original Xbox in an attempt to distance it from the firm's PC roots.





UNIVERSAL PICTURES
The BBFC website – favourite source of leaked news for DVD buffs everywhere – has revealed that the Xbox 360 will ship with around 100 minutes of audio and video content preloaded onto the hard drive. With exciting names like "PUNK ROCK SUPERSTAR.WMA", it seems the material will mostly consist of music tracks and videos as a showcase for the 360's media capabilities. More interesting is what appears to be a 23-minute trailer of 360 titles, called "DVD OF GAME". The content was given a U rating and passed without cuts.



THE AD MAN COMETH
ADVERTISING IN GAMES INCREASES ITS PRESENCE

After last month's reports that advertising firm Massive Inc had finished beta testing its videogame advertising network, new details of how it will affect gameplay have emerged.

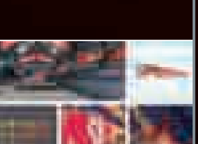
Although Atari's plans for *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* have been announced, the first game to have the advertising system fully integrated into its game engine is VU Games' *SWAT 4*. Upon downloading the latest patch, the game begins dialing into Massive's server to grab posters in order to place them within the game's levels. Incredibly, the game times how long you spend looking at each advert and then relays that information back to the main server and, in turn, Massive's clients – the companies who have paid the firm for advertising space.

So, how does this affect the game? One good example is the level where you visit a petrol station. Previously, the level was dressed in textures that advertised fictional products – not an uncommon sight in gaming. However, after the patch was downloaded the posters on the wall were for a particular brand of soft drink and the products on the shelves were real-life items. As we reported last month, these textures will change dynamically, so the next time that level is played the posters may be different and will be in different places. However, as long as this advertising doesn't affect gameplay then it seems harmless, and in some way could up the immersion levels of some games, particularly those based in the real world.

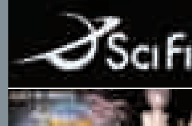
This, however, seems to be just the tip of the advertising iceberg; Coca Cola has also released free downloadable content for PSP game *WipEout Pure* via its website, Cokestyle, containing Coke-themed vehicles and assorted cola-based goodies for the game. This is the first time downloadable content systems have been used this way on the PSP, and it leads to a ton of possibilities for companies to advertise within games. Being that it's not a compulsory download, anyone who chooses to acquire the content is effectively inviting Coke into the warmth of their PSP, therefore having no grounds to complain about ads infecting their game.

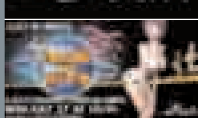
It was only a matter of time before corporate advertising became a big part of videogames. As the medium continues to grow, the bucks are getting bigger, so businesses would be foolish to miss out on such easy advertising opportunities. Although it's a shame that corporate greed is swallowing our chosen pastime, remember this: the vast amounts of money coming in from Coca Cola and the like will allow for games with much larger budgets, hopefully leading to bigger and better games. So it's not all bad.

"ADVERTS COULD UP THE IMMERSION LEVEL OF GAMES BASED IN THE REAL WORLD"



Hungry? Thirsty? Try our tasty beverage…







CHINA MINORS

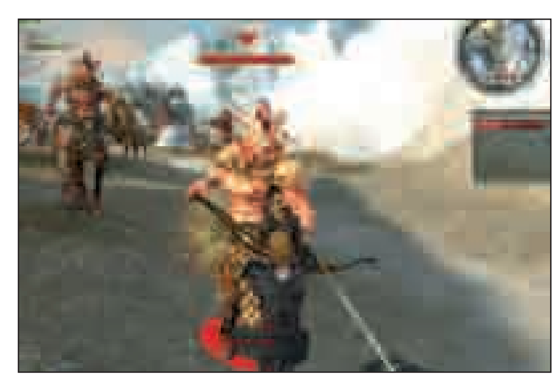
CHINA INVESTS IN ONLINE GAMING, BUT BANS MINORS FROM PLAYING

Last month we reported on an internet addiction clinic set up by the Chinese government. This month, however, Chinese authorities have invested 15 billion yuan ($1.8 billion) in the country's online gaming scene, which could see the emergence of up to 30 development studios in the next few years.

In a move that almost contradicts this, though, the government also announced that a law was being drafted to protect minors from online games in which players kill other players. This is not, it would appear, because of the fear of violent games that has emerged on the back of the *GTA* and *Manhunt*-related lawsuits in the West, but because it encourages them to spend too much time in the game.

"Online games that have player-killing content usually lead to players spending too much time trying to increase the power of their characters," said the head of the Ministry of Internet Culture, Liu Shifa. However, the recent cases of young Chinese and Korean men killing each other – or themselves – over online game-related disagreements will almost certainly have had some hand in inspiring the legislation.

Other restrictions for under-18s, such as a mandatory log-off after a certain number of in-game hours, will also be enshrined in the new law. Though such investment in online gaming will boost China's economy, banning under-18s from playing is likely to alienate a sizeable chunk of potential consumers.



Under 18? Sorry, no online swordplay for you. If you're in China, that is.

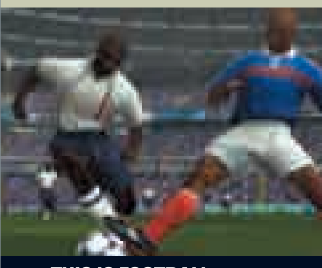
games™ THE TOP FIVE

INAPPROPRIATELY NAMED GAMES



No.5 ETERNAL CHAMPIONS

One sequel at last count



No.4 THIS IS FOOTBALL

We beg to differ



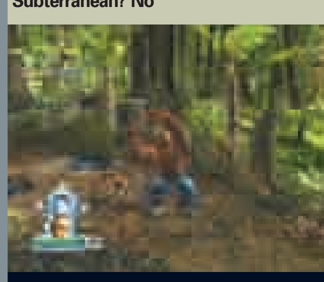
No.3 NO ONE CAN STOP MR DOMINO

We stopped him loads



No.2 NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

Subterranean? No



No.1 FANTASTIC 4

Not fantastic in the slightest

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



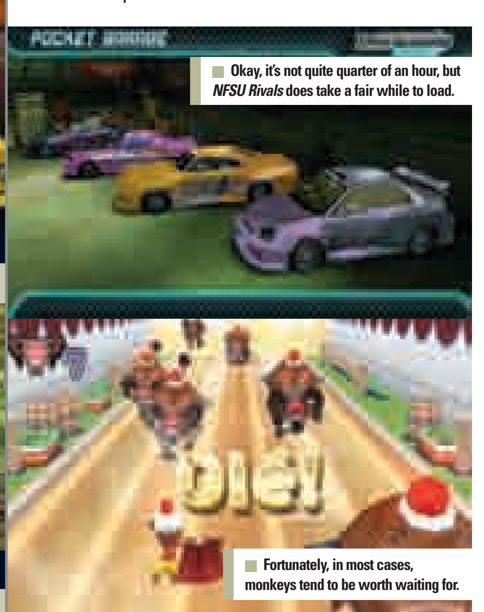
NO. 36: THE LOADING TIME BLUES

We remember well the first time we saw 'those' Hovis adverts. You know, the ones where some kid wearing a flat cap made his way through a faded, sepia town and was forced to push his rubbish bike up a cobbled hill just to get his mitts on a loaf. It seemed harsh and made us realise that maybe, just maybe, when old folk tell us that we've never had it so good, they might be right.

However, this was a one-off. We're currently finding it very difficult to feel the same level of sympathy when people, in answer to the PSP loading-time whining that seems so popular at the moment, start informing us that we 'don't know what loading times are'. This is irritating, because most of us do.

Although it's tempting to make a throwaway comment about the actual definition of a 'loading time', these people are obviously referring back to the days when you'd have to spend 20 minutes watching coloured lines wiggle around before enjoying a brief whipping at the hands of tug-of-war master Gus in *Daley Thompson's Super Test*.

Trust us, we do remember – really well, in fact. Such comments are going to work well on future generations. But not here, not now, not us. Stop it.



Okay, it's not quite quarter of an hour, but *NFSU Rivals* does take a fair while to load.

Fortunately, in most cases, monkeys tend to be worth waiting for.

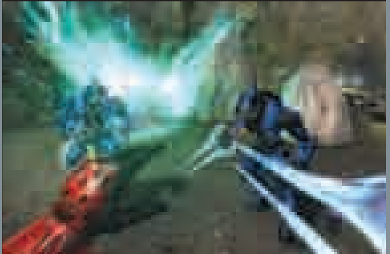
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SWEET CHARITY

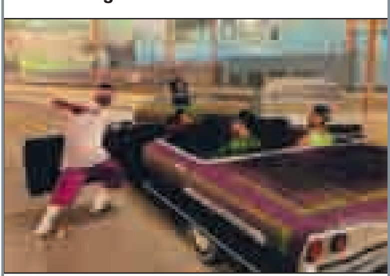
Over half a million gamers voted *Halo 2* the game of the year at the third annual G-Phoria awards, hosted by the American G4 TV network. Bungie's shooter received seven honours, including Game of the Year, Best Multiplayer Game and Best Original Soundtrack. Sony walked away with four gongs including Best Action Game and Best Original Game, while *Half-Life 2* won Best Graphics and Best Female Voice Performance. William Shatner presented Ralph Baer, creator of the first console, the Magnavox Odyssey, with a Special Achievement award.





BREAKING THE LAW

The battle over whether American retailers should be allowed to peddle violent games to minors continued this month as the state of Illinois passed a law enforcing fines of $1,000 (£565) for anyone who commits such a heinous act. Similar laws have been passed and later ruled unconstitutional in other states so this one is unlikely to stand for long, with the games industry arguing that it restricts its right to free speech and the rights of children everywhere who want to be able to dismember people in their privacy of their own games console.

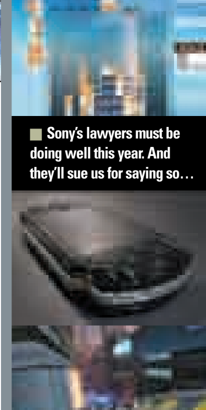




"**NEITHER** THE **PSP NOR ITS GAMES** WILL BE **AVAILABLE** TO US **FROM JAPAN** IF **SONY** HAS ITS WAY"
PASCAL CLARYSSE, LIK-SANG

SONY TAKES LIK-SANG TO COURT OVER PSP IMPORTING

TELL IT TO THE JUDGE



Sony's lawyers must be doing well this year. And they'll sue us for saying so…

Following Sony's attempts to convict importing websites ElectricBirdLand and Nuplayer for selling PSPs to European gamers, it's now picking on a far larger target: Lik-Sang.com. The Hong Kong-based company is being accused of infringing upon Sony's trademarks both by selling the PSP to Europe and by mirroring the PSP manual on the site. This is despite the fact that the manual was freely available on Sony's own site and that Lik-Sang removed the manual and all links to Sony's website when asked to do so. Should this legal action be successful, Lik-Sang will be forced to stop selling PSP games, hardware and accessories to customers in Europe.

Understandably, this case is incensing retailers and consumers, provoking accusations that Sony would like nothing better than total market control. "This is the most aggressive move against its own customers that a console manufacturer has ever taken in the 30-year history of videogames," said Lik-Sang's marketing manager, Pascal Clarysse. "Sony wants to completely cut hardcore gamers away from items released in Japan or anywhere else outside their own country."

Accusatory words, but we can't help but feel that this voraciousness on the part of gaming's market leader is a little facetious and downright dangerous. Should Sony succeed in prosecuting Lik-Sang, one of the biggest online import retailers, it is fairly certain that the entire import scene would be in jeopardy, meaning that European and American gamers would be unable to obtain goods from outside their own territories. "A very active part of the gaming community has been enjoying Japanese gaming culture for over two decades, and that's what the empire is now willing to destroy," said Clarysse.

So far, Sony has been unsuccessful in all of its court actions against importers. Lik-Sang and its owners, Pacific Game Technology (Holding) Limited, operate under the Hong Kong free-trade laws, so all its business is completely lawful according to Hong Kong legislation. Sony has, however, succeeded in claiming a £1,000 fine from retailers for supplying the PSP to Europe. One retailer, however, has recently been approached with a lessened £500 fine after refusing to bow to Sony's initial demands, provoking anger from those who paid the full cost.

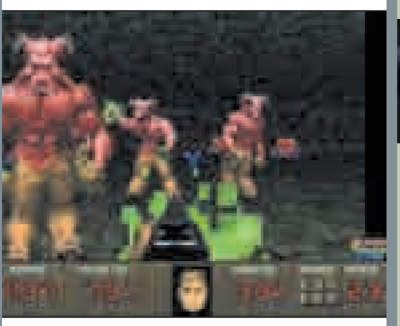
Data stream

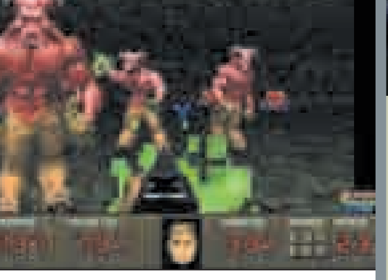
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



DEMON SEED

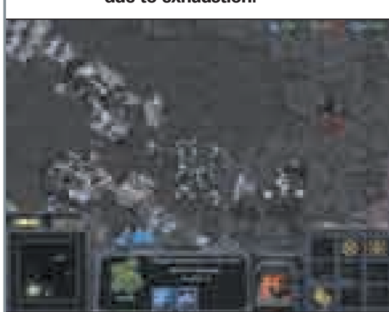
Enterprising hackers have taken a break from trying to install Linux on their toaster (presumably) and ported *Doom* to the iPod instead. The iPod Linux Project has had the inoffensive likes of *Tetris*, *Pong* and *Asteroids* running on Apple's music player for some time, but now that the colour iPod Photos are the standard, things have taken a turn for the demonic with a working port of id Software's first-person classic. Control is awkward and it doesn't quite fit the screen yet, but hey, it's still *Doom* on an iPod and it beats *Brick* and *Solitaire* as a time killer.



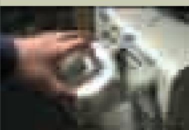


PLAYED TO DEATH

A 28 year-old South Korean man who quit his job to spend more time playing games has died of heart failure after a 50-hour *StarCraft* session in a Taegu internet café. According to the *JoongAng Ilbo* newspaper, his former colleagues were asked by his mother to find him when he didn't come home for three days. They found him at the computer and he agreed to go home only to die minutes later, apparently from heart failure due to exhaustion.







Michael Rawlinson of Elspa. Not Roger Bennett.

PIRACY PUNISHED

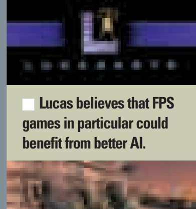
HUSBAND AND WIFE JAILED OVER FAKE GAMES

Elspa has scored another victory for the anti-piracy crusade – a couple from Merseyside have been jailed for a total of 27 months after officials found £28,000 worth of pirated videogames, films and music at their home. Andrew King and his estranged wife Angela were also found guilty of benefit fraud when they appeared at Liverpool Crown Court on 1 August.

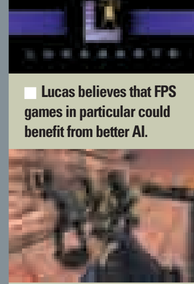
Police, Trading Standards officers and an investigator from software body Elspa raided the couple's home and discovered the stash of counterfeit material in a hidden cupboard. Andrew King was sentenced to 18 months in prison for trademark infringement and benefit fraud; Angela King received a six-month sentence for the same offences.

Elspa deputy director general Michael Rawlinson hopes that this case will deter people from earning illegal income. "These offenders were profiting through crime, not only riding on the back of creative industries but also lining their pockets with tax payers' money," he said. His sentiments were echoed by a Trading Standards official, who said that "hopefully, this sends out a strong message that piracy… will not be tolerated."

What with the recent conviction of a 22-year-old man who was selling modded Xboxes, and the ongoing war between Sony and hungry hackers, it would appear that the enormous effort being made to protect the videogames and film industries from opportunists is finally starting to pay off.



Lucas believes that FPS games in particular could benefit from better AI.



LUCAS GOT GAME

STAR WARS SUPREMO WANTS IN ON GAMING

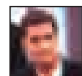
Star Wars fever may be abating but director George Lucas is keeping himself busy. Speaking at SIGGRAPH, the recent interactive entertainment and digital animation conference, Lucas outlined his plans for introducing digitally animated television to Eastern markets and outlined his wish for greater AI in games, believing that better AI will lead to more immersive, narrative-based game experiences.

During a 'Q&A with the Father of Digital Cinema' event, Lucas highlighted his intent to get more involved with the videogames-based section of his company, LucasArts. The studio, though mostly known for its many *Star Wars* games, also developed many much-loved adventure titles, including *Sam & Max Hit The Road* and the *Monkey Island* titles.

Lucas also commented on voice recognition, saying that he would like it to get to a point where "you can talk to the game and it will talk back". Referring particularly to first-person shooters, Lucas hoped that increased AI could turn such games into "intelligent and challenging first-person shooter-type dramas". Though better AI won't get anyone anywhere without better game scriptwriters…

Data stream

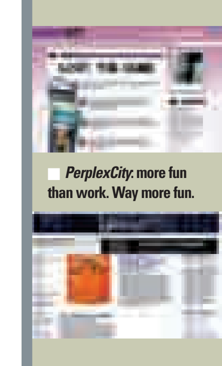
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BOLL-OCKS

Uwe Boll, the director known for such 'classic' game-to-film adaptations as *House Of The Dead* and *Alone In The Dark*, has started production on his version of PC RPG *Dungeon Siege*, set for release in 2006. Despite the fact that having Boll at the helm is usually a very bad sign, the film has inexplicably managed to attract some decent talent. Ray Liotta (*Goodfellas, GTA: Vice City*), John Rhys-Davies (*Raiders Of The Lost Ark, Lord Of The Rings*) and Ron Perlman (*Hellboy, Blade II*) have all signed up to commit career suicide as a lowly farmer attempts to stop a coup by Liotta's general in a medieval utopia.





PerplexCity: more fun than work. Way more fun.

NEW MIND-BENDING GAME SET TO CHALLENGE BRAIN AND WALLET

INSANE IN THE MEMBRANE

As long-time readers may be aware, we're quite fond of the work of Cliff Johnson – a man whose gaming mix of puzzles within puzzles has kept us confused for years. Now it appears that someone has taken his metapuzzle concept and applied it to a card-based challenge worth £100,000… and oh, how hooked we are.

Set in a fantasy world of the same name, *PerplexCity* is a metapuzzle Alternative Reality Game (ARG) of epic proportions – part game, part interactive story, part treasure hunt, it's already being played by thousands of people around the world. By buying cards (available in packs of six from only nine stores around the world, or online at www.firebox.com) and solving the puzzles on them, players can not only build up points that add to their online tally but also earn vital clues to the biggest mystery of all: who stole the Receda Cube and where did they hide it? The first person to solve the crime and find the Cube can claim the whopping £100,000 prize.

Making use of a multitude of techniques from simple riddles and conundrums to heat-sensitive inks, microscopic text and ultra-violet writing, *PerplexCity* is a game of a different kind (which probably explains why we're now obsessed with it). More information can be found at www.perplexcity.com, but be warned: we're already way ahead of you on the answers…

GAMES TO BE TRAILED AS LESSONS IN SELECT SECONDARY SCHOOLS

GAMES LESSON

Refreshing news this – instead of every authority figure and moral guardian taking the anti-videogame stance (as per usual), four secondary schools in the UK will experiment with the integration of videogames into lessons.

The four schools, in collaboration with Electronic Arts, will not just focus on traditional educational software, but recreational videogames as well. EA believes that videogames can actually have a very positive effect on children. "Computer games engage the brain like no other media," said Claus Due of EA Europe, "and we believe that children can – and already do – learn a lot through them."

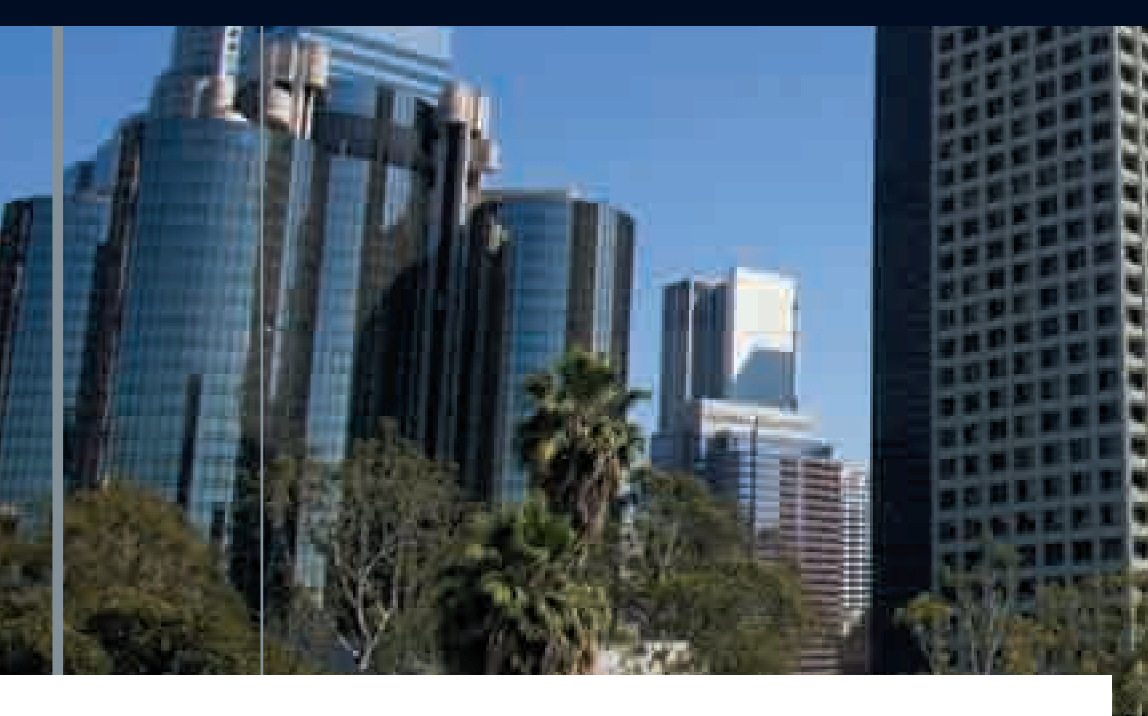
Is this merely a cynical ploy by EA to show itself as the moral opposite of Rockstar – a family-friendly, positive firm? We'd like to think not. Hopefully, EA is forging the way for videogames getting a little bit of praise in the media for once.

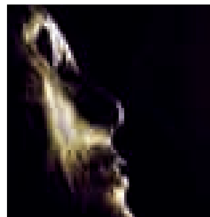







eMag





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE





Don't worry – he's just a crooked cop. It's not like he's busting a cap in your ass.

"TRANSPORTING THE MANCHESTER BAND BACK TO THE CITY, THIS WHITE LIMOUSINE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DESERT

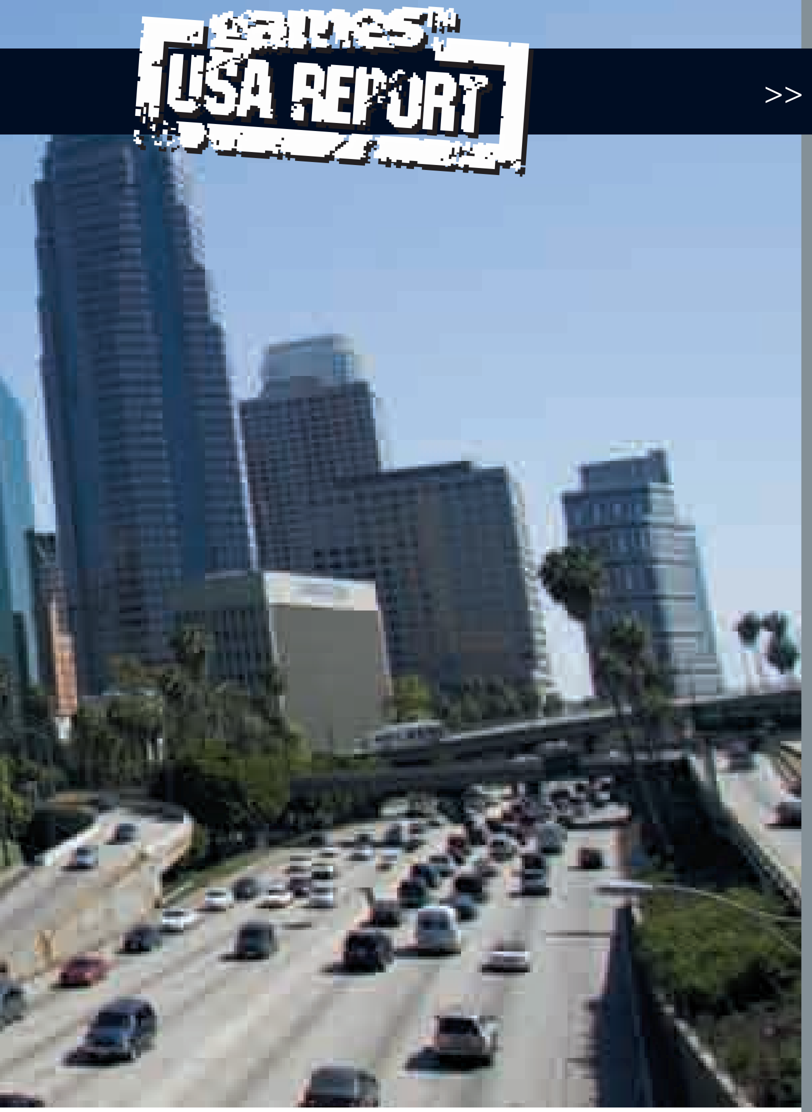
Well, I've just had *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* ruined for me. My landlady, a fifty-something Floridian who pops up to the north-east now and then to check on her properties, brought a grandchild to my house. Bonus: when she went off on an errand, she left this child with me! Now, to be clear, I hate children. Not least because they terrify me in many ways. They're so unpredictable. Sometimes they cry or yell or break stuff you'd really prefer they left alone. They can even be sick, like, just because they're so fragile. This one, Tyler, seemed to be standing up on his own okay and was able to talk and everything. I would estimate that he had survived between 10 and 25 winters.

So I was left with Tyler, fretful because I don't know what children want to do or even how to support the head properly. And if they're standing there in denims with a baseball cap, talking to you intelligibly, are you meant to support the head? It's a minefield. Happily, it transpired Tyler just wanted to play videogames, which is likely the only common ground I share with one of their sort. He looked over the boxes and chose *San Andreas*. Effectively, he spent the next hour destroying this game.

This kid, who clearly disapproved of my progress in CJ's adventure, knew the cheat codes like beat-'em-up combos. He kept throwing them in, and just blew the game apart. Clickety-click-click: a fresh Harrier jump jet appeared. Clickety-clickety-click: the Wanted level stars vanished. Click-clickety-click: the health bar filled, the money soared up. My prized mini-gun, stolen from Area 69 with only 200 rounds remaining? Infinite ammo. And on and on. On the Las Venturas mission where you must steal four police bikes and deliver them precariously to a moving truck on the highway, he'd deliver a bike, jump off, summon a fighter jet, fly to the next bike, abandon the jet and repeat, all with a suppressed fugitive level so that nobody cared when he killed the cops to steal their wheels. Transporting the Manchester band back to the city, on another mission, he simply summoned a white limousine in the middle of the desert and flew it – yes, flew it – back.

After committing a number of these heresies, with God knows how many codes active, Tyler tore off to the suburbs, bought a house, ran inside and in a flash was in the save screen overwriting my honest working man's progress with this filthy travesty.

There were uncomfortable moments, too. Near the beginning, he paused for a moment on the sidewalk, rotated the camera around my somewhat personalised CJ that I hadn't realised a wee bairn would ever see, and said after some seconds, "Is this the gimp costume?". I'm not sure what I said because, frankly, I became acutely aware that my CJ was still in possession of a double-ended purple dildo from the sex shop



CODE-TOUTING KID SUMMONED A AND FLEW IT – YES, FLEW IT – BACK"

mission and I was wondering if it might be possible to delete this item from the inventory using only my mind.

The thought entered my head that this was a chance, at least, to do some social research (I'm all about the job). Of course! Hot Coffee! Here's a kid that's obviously got his finger on the pulse, I thought, downloading cheats and learning how to exploit the game a hundred ways as he has. "Did your mom stop you playing this when Hot Coffee made the news?"

"What?" he asked, without recognition in his eyes.

"You know, the sex mini-games. Hidden sex scenes." I couldn't stop saying sex. And even as the words left my mouth I wanted to inhale them all back in. I saw a flash of little Tyler crying and talking to his parents: "And when I was alone with him, the horrible foreign man asked me about sex, mommy! Sex games!"

It was mostly quiet after that. Tyler stormed a police station, killing hundreds of cops. Some of them he shot repeatedly once they'd already fallen, or were missing a head. Observing my concern, Tyler said, "My little brother, five years old, he plays this. But we turn the volume down so he doesn't hear the cursing."

Ah, that's okay then, I absolutely didn't think to myself.

Many thanks



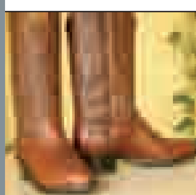
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Top spine-free CDs



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Lucchese boots



GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

COMP USA



Our version of PC World, except they have an adequate Mac section and many of the employees have put puberty behind them. What's nice is that anything outside the standard PC domain of hard drives and Ethernet cards confuses them, leading to erroneous prices on console games and such.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Madden NFL 2006	EA Sports	PS2
2	Madden NFL 2006	EA Sports	Xbox
3	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	PS2
4	Fantastic 4	Activision	PS2
5	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	PS2
6	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Novalogic	Xbox
7	NCAA Football 2006	EA Sports	PS2
8	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	EA Games	PS2
9	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Novalogic	PS2
10	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Xbox

(Updated 22/08/05)



Madden NFL 2006

Destroy All Humans!



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

“THIS BIZARRE COLLECTING CONTEST HAS AN IMPENETRABLE ‘POKÉMON SUPER CATCH-’EM-ALL EXPLOSION MADNESS

Summer has come in full force. Temperatures of more than 36 degrees are not uncommon for the middle of the night in Tokyo, and reasonable adults in their mid-thirties with unreasonable children in their upper single digits are inspired to run around in the afternoon, boarding a train, getting off at the next station, running down the stairs and out of the station, exiting the turnstile, waiting in line, sweaty, running back in through the turnstile, running up the stairs, scrambling to board the train headed in the direction they were going previously, and then getting off at the next station and repeating the whole process. What, exactly, is the reason for this strange behaviour?

Well, quite simply, it's Pokémon. The contest has a Japanese name. That name is stupid and long and impervious to dictionaries, so we'll call it the ‘Pokémon Super Catch-’Em-All Explosion Madness Wacky Heat Rally 2005’. The rules of the contest are simple: armed with one shiny paper leaflet per person, run to a kiosk outside each station in the greater Tokyo area and receive a stamp bearing the mark of a specific Pokémon proving that you went to that station. Fill up the leaflet with stamps and send it in for a chance (a chance!) to win a plastic Pikachu teacup or a blue baseball cap with the new Pokémon movie's star embroidered on its front.

He really will catch them all, you know. Unless he gets bored.

This has been going on for eight years now.

Every year, these past eight years, on that first weekend in August, parents and kids run, get stamps, run, ride trains, get stamps, run some more and get more stamps. There's very little love to it; a cynical friend says it resembles levelling up your Pokémon in its tedium. Except the kids are really getting out of the house. To do what, though? I could see if the prizes were great, or if the family members were paying for individual train tickets, but they're just running on an all-day pass, and it's not like they're visiting these towns they'd otherwise never have a reason to visit. They spend 98 per cent of the day crammed in a train with other teacup-winning hopefuls.

I suppose you could say that the contest encourages young kids to learn about the train system and remember facts about which lines run through which stations. I can't help feeling that trivial knowledge is trivial knowledge; numerous train simulator games point to the fact that Japanese people sometimes go nuts over train system trivia, though at the end of the day, what does it matter if a kid remembers how long it takes the Keiyo Express to get to Maihama, or if he remembers how many levels it takes Mew to learn Confusion? Is this the best way to train kids to enter middle school? (Here, I gracefully omit a 5,000-word angry letter



NAME, SO WE'LL CALL IT THE WACKY HEAT RALLY 2005'"

to the Japanese education authorities regarding entrance exams.) Kids in Japan grow up obsessed with either Pokémon or trains. The ones who choose Pokémon end up bitter, hardcore gamers who collect shoot-'em-up arcade boards; the ones who choose trains either collect train simulators, get a job driving trains, or just descend into an inescapable pit of weirdoism.

What the yearly Pokémon Win-A-Teacup Hell Marathon should enlighten us all about, above all else, is that though you might be getting bored of Pokémon, the kids who were born the year the first Pokémon game was released are still in elementary school, and they sure aren't bored of Pokémon yet. Nintendo might be losing the older fans, but as people continue to meet at company parties, fall in love and have accidents (condoms are about £2 each, and all other contraceptives are taboo), Nintendo's got a steady stream of customers coming down the tube.

Kind regards



EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT NINTENDO BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

My friend at Sony likes to rail against Nintendo whenever there's a commercial for a Pokémon game on television. She says, "You know, they got started making hanafuda cards?" I tell her, yeah, that stopped being obscure knowledge around the time the name Shigeru Miyamoto was released to the public in 1994.

What you might not know is that hanafuda cards were, in old times, used pretty much exclusively by petty thugs and yakuza for gambling away money in poor villages they held beneath their grimy boots. Nintendo, for the longest time, thrived on grimy business, running hourly hotels, cigarette machines and slot parlours all over what amounts to Japan's 'seedy west side'.

"They're stingy bastards," says this Sony friend, whose grudge seems oddly personal. "They're the stingiest game company probably ever. Sure, they have a high standard of quality. You should see what they pay people, though." I offer, maybe the quality's so high because the pay is so low and the employees think that by positively impacting the company's good reputation they'll get a raise. My friend sniffs and says, "Why don't you work there, then?". What's that supposed to mean?

TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON THIRTY SIX	CRUSHING THE DREAMS OF CHILDREN
Oi, soko no omae. Gakiyarou.	Hey, you over there. You little bastard.
Yume wo motteirundeshou ka?	Do you have a dream?
Souda! Boku ni wa, yume ga aru!!	Yes! I have a great dream!
Boku dattesa, sekaiichi no POKÉMON TOREENAA ni naruyo!!	I'm gonna be the greatest Pokémon Trainer in the world!!
Soussuka? Datte, Pokémon honmono janaimon. Soremade shitteinakereba zettaini sono TEiKOPPU ataerareneendayo.	Oh yeah? Well, Pokémon ain't real. How do you expect to win a damn teacup if you don't even know Pokémon ain't real, huh?

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	World Soccer Winning Eleven 9	Konami	PS2
2	Grandia III	Square-Enix	PS2
3	Pokémon XD: Gale Of Darkness	Nintendo	GC
4	Summon Night EX Thesis	Banpresto	PS2
5	Super Robot Wars Alpha 3	Banpresto	PS2
6	Armored Core: Last Raven	FROM Software	PS2
7	Bleach: Erabareshi Tamashii	SCE	PS2
8	Gentle Brain Exercises	Nintendo	DS
9	The King Of Beetle Mushiking	Sega	GBA
10	Power Pocket Koushien	Konami	DS

(Week ending 07/08/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)

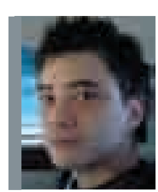

Grandia III

Pokémon XD: GOD



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

MMOH MY GOODNESS



It's the dream we've always had as kids but have never been able to live. Until now, that is. Sure, we've explored faraway lands before and saved the princess or killed Lord Bigbadman, but it's always been a lonely experience. We tried to drag other people along when *Secret Of Mana* gave us multiplayer RPGs, but Derek was always busy. Family things. Other games. More importantly, he complained when I wore only my pants.

That's all changed now, and the stories are better. No more dull Dungeons & Dragons tosh about Silverbeard Bigsword drinking mead and fighting goblins. Well, still a bit of that. But now it's real. Now I'm saving my actual friends from the bad guys. Now we're really up against the odds, fighting things we shouldn't be because we're cocky and over-confident, creating shared experiences that are as real as we allow them to be, and then we're talking about them later over beers, plotting the next adventure. Now we have company.

And it's only going to get better. Now, we can live the life of an assassin, or a bald girl-monk covered in tattoos, or even a spandex-clad hero, flying around the rooftops of a huge city. Soon, we'll be able to drive cars with massive cannons strapped to the roof, or run around on other planets in hoodies waving swords three times the size of our bodies. And it will be real. Real because other people will be there with us, living similar lives, sharing similar experiences. Real because we want it to be, and so do those around us.

Other people will tell us it's a fantasy, but let them. Leave them to their TV shows and their books; they're just lone observers. We'll be there, fighting side by side, together. As friends.

Leo Tan touts the wares of NCsoft during the day, while working as a videogame ninja in his spare time.

FROM THE FRONT

SONY AND NINTENDO ARE COUNTING THE PENNIES THIS MONTH AS FINANCIAL RESULTS ARE DOWN

PROFIT DROPS FOR SONY AND NINTENDO

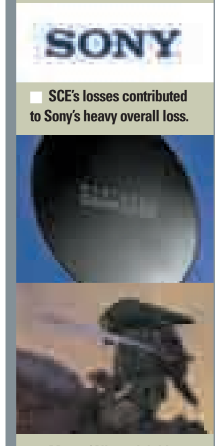
IT'S TOUGH AT THE TOP

Videogaming may be booming but two of the industry's biggest players have announced heavy losses for the second financial quarter of 2005. In early August, Sony's Computer Entertainment division announced significant financial drops for Q2; Nintendo, meanwhile, though still significantly clear of the red, has reported a large slide in profits. However, Sony has raised its shipment targets for its two current consoles and it's likely that Nintendo will achieve its 12.4 million sales target for the DS before the end of the fiscal year.

Sony's losses, it would appear, are largely due to the development costs of the PlayStation3, as there has actually been an increase in PS2 and software sales compared to the results for the same period last year. Though software sales have increased by 64 per cent and sales of the PS2 rose significantly in Europe and the US, SCE's overall losses were twice those of Q2 2004 at ¥5.9 billion; the Sony Corp conglomerate has made a total loss of ¥7.3 billion this quarter. Sony suggests that "selling, administrative and marketing expenses" contributed to the loss.

Nintendo might at least still be in profit, but its finances are still a cause for concern. The DS proved a saviour as almost 1.4 million games flew off the shelves in the June quarter, but only 260,000 GameCubes were sold, and the GBA sold 2.3 million fewer units than it did this time last year. Software sales were also low, which is not entirely unexpected given that no high-profile games were released during the second quarter.

With the new hardware generation approaching, the companies at the top are going to need very strong initial next-gen sales in order to recoup their losses. But will there be enough consumers to go around?



SCE's losses contributed to Sony's heavy overall loss.

Most of Nintendo's big releases, such as *Twilight Princess*, are still to come.

Blizzard's HQ in un-blizzard-stricken California.

BLIZZARD STAFF RELOCATED

SUMMER SHUTDOWN

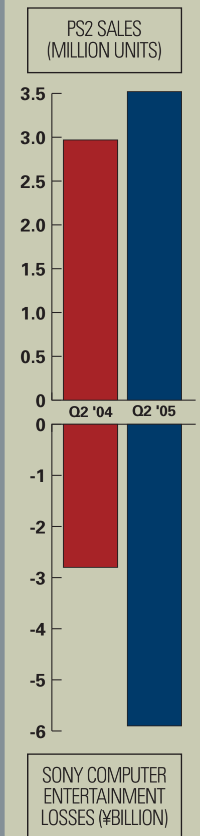
Blizzard North, the development team behind *Diablo*, has been moved out of its studio and relocated to Blizzard headquarters in Irvine, South California.

There are persistent rumours that the North team was working on a third instalment in the *Diablo* series, but whatever its new project is, we've been assured that development will continue unaffected at Blizzard Games HQ. Blizzard's co-founder and president Mike Morhaime says that the relocation of Blizzard North "represents an opportunity for all our teams to have regular, direct input on each other's projects".

The secondary studio's closure will hopefully unite Blizzard's staff after a series of departures over the last few years. Founders Erich and Max Schaefer and David Brevik all left to form a new development studio, Flagship, in 2003. In 2000, ex-Blizzard North employees formed ArenaNet, which along with NCsoft was recently responsible for the development of the successful fee-free MMORPG *Guild Wars*. Blizzard North itself developed the *Diablo* series of games and was acquired by Blizzard Games in 1996.



"SONY'S LOSSES ARE **LARGELY DUE** TO THE **DEVELOPMENT COSTS** OF THE PLAYSTATION3"



UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**Brian Lara Int' Cricket 2005**	Codemasters	Multi
2	**Madagascar**	Activision	Multi
3	**Fantastic 4**	Activision	Multi
4	**Charlie And The Chocolate Factory**	Take 2	Multi
5	**Cricket 2005**	EA Sports	Multi
6	**Lego Star Wars**	Eidos	Multi
7	**Medal Of Honor: European Assault**	EA Games	Multi
8	**Juiced**	THQ	Multi
9	**Destroy All Humans!**	THQ	Multi
10	**Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas**	Rockstar	Xbox

You'd never guess it was the height of the UK games industry's 'dry' period, would you? It's rare that a chart makes us sigh with sheer disappointment, but then we saw this month's top five.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 13 August 2005)



Brian Lara Int' Cricket 2005

Charlie And The Chocolate Factory

MOH: European Assault

TAPWAVE TAPS OUT



ZODIAC MULTIMEDIA HANDHELD 'RETIRED'

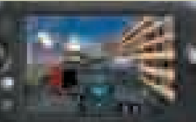
Despite having initially announced that is was moving into 'developing co-branded Zodiac products' (something we reported back in issue 33), Tapwave has recently said that it will no longer be releasing or supporting the Zodiac multimedia device at all. The machine appeared in the US in 2003 and had a muted debut in the UK late last year, though it did attract some critical acclaim for its many abilities.

"We are sorry to inform you that the Zodiac business was discontinued and service and support are no longer available," reads a statement issued by the Tapwave team. It's not entirely clear whether or not the parent firm will continue any operations, although the fact that the company website advises all those with unresolved claims to contact Ueker and Associates, a well-known liquidation specialist, doesn't bode well.

The Zodiac's demise could be blamed on its relative lack of prominence next to handheld systems such as the GBA, DS and, latterly, the PSP. Though it had PDA functionality, the Zodiac only had a library of around 20 games and the £300 asking price may have deterred many consumers.

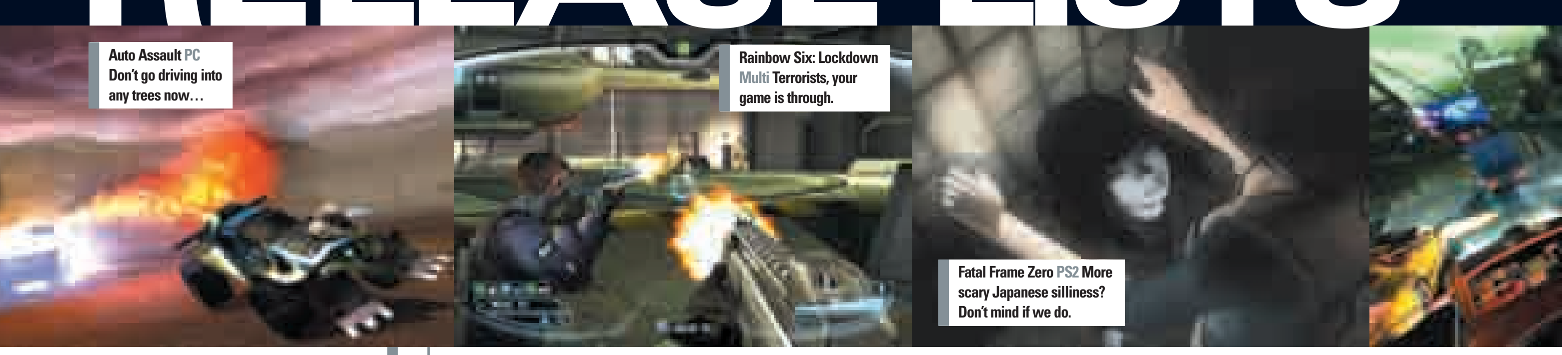


It's quite possible you won't have used one of Tapwave's machines before…



…but the Zodiac was critically lauded in the US and UK press.

RELEASE LISTS



Auto Assault PC Don't go driving into any trees now…

Rainbow Six: Lockdown Multi Terrorists, your game is through.

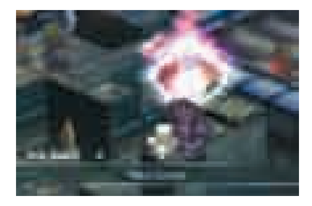
Fatal Frame Zero PS2 More scary Japanese silliness? Don't mind if we do.



MAKAI KINGDOM: CHRONICLES OF THE SACRED TOME

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: NIS America

To make sure nothing would interfere with our hardcore levelling up, we took the precaution this month of bolting our PS2 shut and gluing the power switch in the on position. It's not like we were going to play any other games anyway…



WINNING ELEVEN 9

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

…Or so we thought. Then Mr Postman was so kind as to bring us a shiny new copy of Konami's latest footy update and out came the bolt cutters. Between stat-happy strategy RPGing and the odd enhanced kick-around, we really couldn't be any happier.



VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 EVOLUTION

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega

Thanks, Sega. Your E3 next-gen teaser really got our metaphorical juices flowing and we've drifted back to your last brawler only to rekindle an old flame and be reminded how simplistic *Tekken 5* is by comparison. Now hurry up and get *Virtua Fighter 5* out, eh?



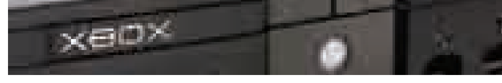
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER '05			
9 September	Colosseum: Road To Freedom	Koei	
9 September	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Xplosiv	
9 September	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	
9 September	Taito Legends	Xplosiv	
9 September	Fahrenheit	Atari	
16 September	Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Wanted
16 September	Total Overdose	SCi	
23 September	Evil Dead Regeneration	THQ	
23 September	Mortal Kombat Shaolin Monks	Midway	
23 September	Sniper Elite	Ubisoft	Wanted
30 September	The Suffering: Ties That Bind	Midway	
30 September	Beat Down: Fists Of Vengeance	Capcom	
TBC	Genji	Sony	
TBC	Resident Evil Outbreak File #2	Capcom	
TBC	Spartan: Total Warrior	Sega	Wanted
TBC	SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	
TBC	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2006	Electronic Arts	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	S.L.A.I.	Konami	
OCTOBER '05			
7 October	Armored Core: Nexus	Digital Jesters	
14 October	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Atari	
14 October	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
21 October	LA Rush	Midway	
28 October	Makai Kingdom: Chronicles Of The Sacred Tome	Koei	Wanted
28 October	Without Warning	Capcom	
TBC	NHL 2006	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Soul Calibur III	Sony	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Prince Of Persia Kindred Blades	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves	Sony	
Q4 '05			
TBC	GUN	Activision	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Wanted
TBC	FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
TBC	SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	



GAMECUBE

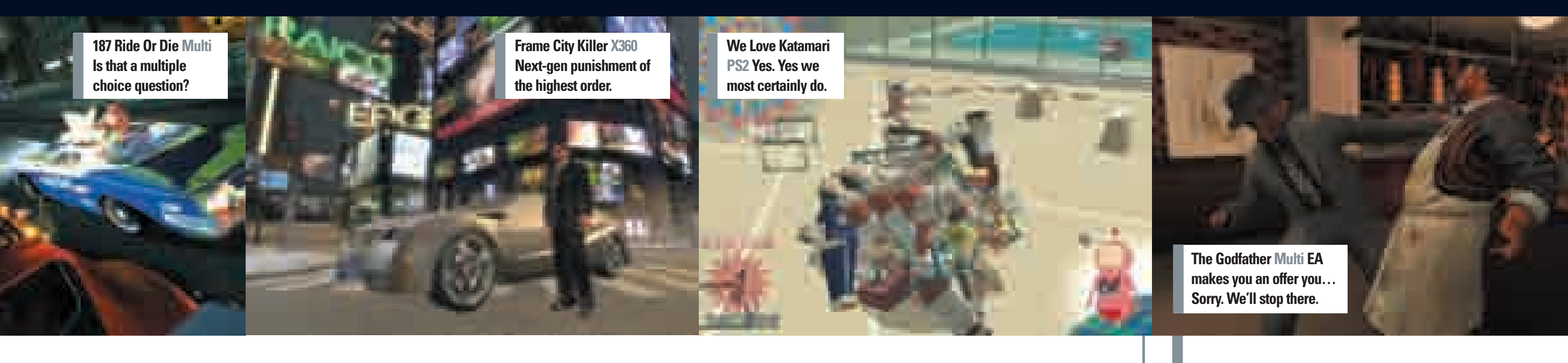
Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER '05			
9 September	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Xplosiv	
TBC	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2006	Electronic Arts	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi	
OCTOBER '05			
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	Dancing Stage: Mario Mix	Nintendo	
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Prince Of Persia Kindred Blades	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Pokémon XD: Gale Of Darkness	Nintendo	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	
TBC	GUN	Activision	
TBC	FIFA 2006	Electronic Art	
TBC	Battalion Wars	Nintendo	
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Fire Emblem: Path Of Radiance	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER '05			
9 September	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Xplosiv	
9 September	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	
9 September	Fahrenheit	Atari	
16 September	Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Wanted
23 September	Dynasty Warriors 5	Koei	
TBC	FarCry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2006	Electronic Arts	
Q3 '05			
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
OCTOBER '05			
7 October	Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes	Koch Media	
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
14 October	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Atari	
14 October	Darkwatch	Ubisoft	
21 October	LA Rush	Midway	
TBC	NHL 2006	Electronic Arts	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



187 Ride Or Die Multi Is that a multiple choice question?

Frame City Killer X360 Next-gen punishment of the highest order.

We Love Katamari PS2 Yes. Yes we most certainly do.

The Godfather Multi EA makes you an offer you… Sorry. We'll stop there.

NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Prince Of Persia Kindred Blades	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Wanted
TBC	FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	
TBC	GUN	Activision	
TBC	SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER '05			
9 September	Fahrenheit	Atari	
9 September	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Xplosiv	
9 September	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
23 September	Evil Dead Regeneration	THQ	
23 September	Sniper Elite	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Starship Troopers	Empire	
OCTOBER '05			
7 October	Total Club Manager 2006	Electronic Arts	
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	F.E.A.R.	Vivendi	Wanted
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Prince Of Persia Kindred Blades	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
TBC	Age Of Empires III	Microsoft	
TBC	Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games	Wanted
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.	THQ	Wanted
TBC	The Movies	Activision	Wanted

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER '05			
16 September	Mega Man Zero 4	Capcom	
16 September	Yu-Gi-Oh! Destiny Board Traveller	Konami	
30 September	Driv3r	Atari	
30 September	Wario Ware: Twisted!	Nintendo	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	
OCTOBER '05			
7 October	The Nightmare Before Christmas: The Pumpkin King	Capcom	
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Alien Hominid	Zoo	
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Prince Of Persia Kindred Blades	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER '05			
23 September	Coded Arms	Konami	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Wanted
OCTOBER '05			
TBC	FIFA Football	Electronic Arts	
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play	Midway	
Q4 '05			
TBC	GUN	Activision	
TBC	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
TBC	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted

NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER '05			
16 September	Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow	Konami	Wanted
30 September	Advance Wars: Dual Strike	Nintendo	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Lunar Genesis	Ubisoft	
TBC	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi	
OCTOBER '05			
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	Metroid Prime: Hunters	Nintendo	Wanted
NOVEMBER '05			
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Mario & Luigi 2	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Animal Crossing DS	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	
TBC	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



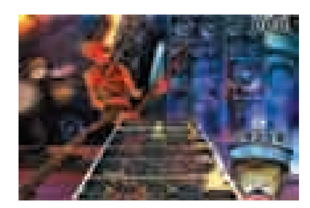
POKÉMON DIAMOND/PEARL

Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
The preparations are already underway for catching the next wave of cute and cuddly creatures – time off has been booked, ground rules laid down for versus play, and squads already discussed at length. Temptation to import Japanese version rising by the second…



GUITAR HERO

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: TBC
Harmonix only makes awesome games. This is why we're so excited about its newest project, a peripheral-based music game in the vein of *Guitar Freaks*. Having seen someone attempt to rock out with *Guitar Hero*, we can't wait to prove how much better we're blatantly going to be.

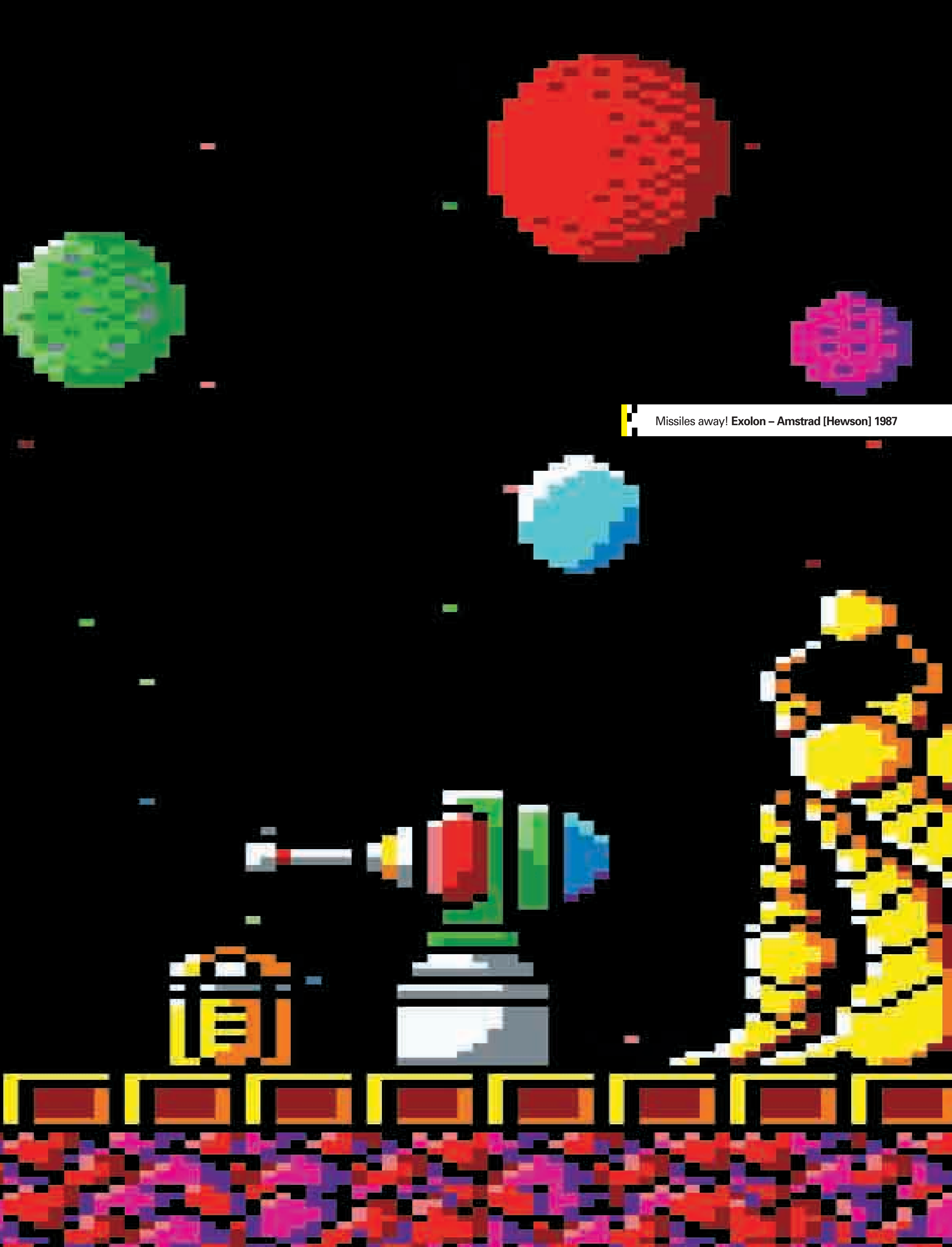


WINNING ELEVEN 9 UBIQUITOUS EVOLUTION

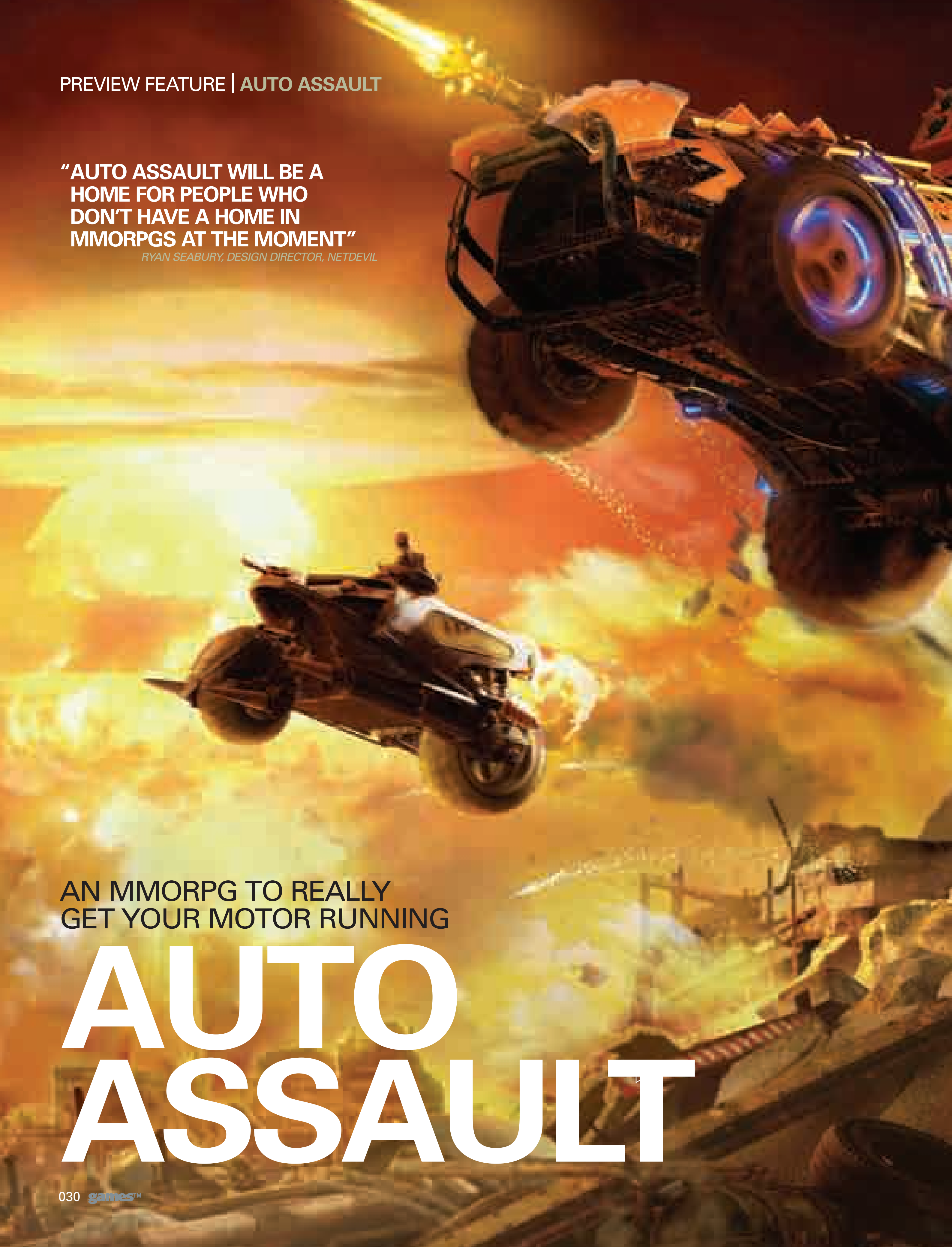
Format: PSP
Publisher: Konami
Bby the time you read this, the portable version of *Pro-Evo*-in-all-but-name will be just a few days away and we'll be gibbering wrecks until that parcel arrives. Welcome to a few months of nothing getting done round here.







Missiles away! **Exolon – Amstrad [Hewson] 1987**



> "AUTO ASSAULT WILL BE A HOME FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE A HOME IN MMORPGS AT THE MOMENT"
> *RYAN SEABURY, DESIGN DIRECTOR, NETDEVIL*

AN MMORPG TO REALLY GET YOUR MOTOR RUNNING

AUTO ASSAULT



AUTO ASSAULT

PC

Broadband is a wondrous thing. In fact, we find it hard to believe that we survived for so long without it. The thought of stuttering our way through a decent online game through a 56k modem causes us physical pain, and you can be sure that the amazing world of the MMORPG wouldn't be nearly as popular if people were stuck on dial-up connections. Elves, Dwarves, Rangers – we've taken on the mantel of all of them, but now it's time for something a little different. Imagine, if you will, a massively multiplayer world where standing back, casting spells and launching arrows isn't an option and where the usual MMORPG rules don't apply. Welcome to *Auto Assault*.

"Even after playing for thousands of hours, I still find myself blowing the shit out of everything," admits Ryan Seabury, design director at NetDevil. This comment alone goes quite a long way to convincing us that we're in for something more exciting than your standard online adventure. We're right. *Auto Assault* is like no MMORPG we've ever seen, boasting a futuristic setting, massive amounts of destruction, and combat at speeds that force you to question exactly how the tactics on display are being formulated. The reason for this speed? Vehicles.

As the name suggests, vehicles play a large part in the game. So large, in fact, that only when you're at an outpost does your avatar leave the driving seat and show their physical form. "One of the big lessons we learnt from our first game, *Jumpgate*, is that you need a proper avatar," Seabury says, explaining why the whole game doesn't take place on wheels. "By not having one, we found there was a disconnection between player and character – your character was nothing more than a name on a screen. Humans

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: NCsoft
DEVELOPER: NetDevil
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

COMMENT

■ Choose to join the ranks of the Mutants, Biomeks or Humans and embark on a vehicle-based adventure to wipe out the other factions.

HISTORY

■ After finding that its plans for developing an MMORPG involving superheroes had already been thought of by another studio, NetDevil decided to work towards its next choice – an MMORPG using vehicles in a post-apocalyptic setting.



NAMESAKE PROFILE

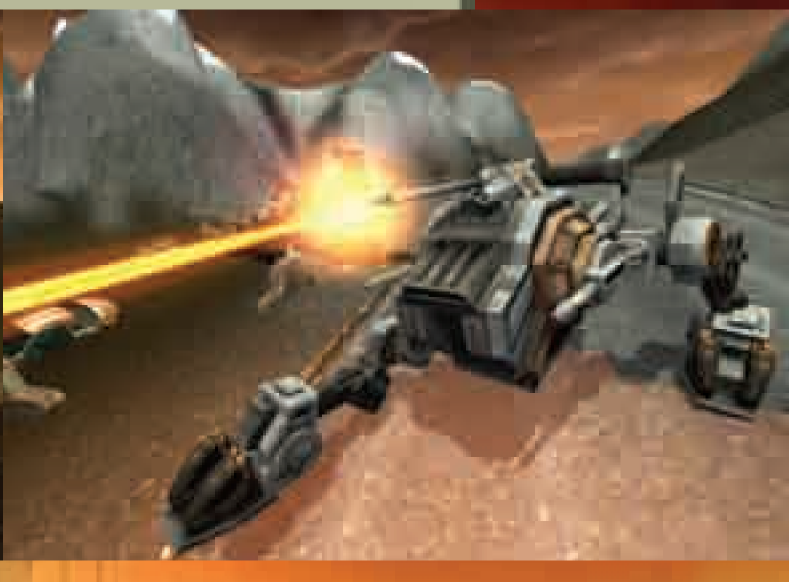
■ The Netdevil is a predatory fish that lives in the deepest parts of the oceans. It has a large flat head, wide mouth and lots of teeth. It looks terrifying – even more so to the smaller fish that it lures into its mouth with the light that dangles from its head.

HISTORY

■ BEING A FISH, THE NETDEVIL HAS NOT MADE ANY GAMES



■ Look, the car's turned into a robot. There's no way the players aren't going to love that.



relate to faces, that's where we centre our attention – around the head and shoulders. It's just the way the human brain works."

We'd agree with that logic, and despite the short time that the drivers of the vehicles are on show they're looking very nice indeed. This strikes us as a good thing, because if corners were going to be cut during development, rarely seen characters would have seemed the obvious place to start.

This is all well and good, but you can't help but feel that the insertion of vehicles into an MMORPG must have been tough, and if weaknesses are going to show then it'll be the combat that's going to show the cracks. Fortunately, it doesn't take long to discover that there's not likely to be any cause for panic. Had *Auto Assault* shared a style with either *World Of Warcraft* or *Guild Wars* then we may have had a problem, but NetDevil has forced you into its way of playing by not only coaxing you with a fully destructible environment (which, incidentally, will be brought to you by the Havok 2 physics engine, which will provide physics that have, to date, been deemed impossible in an MMORPG) but also with a combo system to coax you into the action and drag you from the MMO formulae that have become the norm.

"One of our early desires was mainly to keep the action extremely high-paced," Seabury informs us. "We wanted a real frenzy so you don't have time to think – just play, play, play. What we found by doing focus tests was that although some people would play the way we wanted them to, players that had been conditioned by other MMORPG games would 'pull out' individual enemies." He speaks of the somewhat cheap, yet usually necessary, tactic of luring out individual enemies from their group so you can take them out more easily.

"The solution to this was our Killing Spree mechanic," he continues. "Each kill will give you an XP bonus and you have a short amount of time to get your next and get a bonus. The result is that you plan your attack around taking everyone one



■ Ooh, another exploding car. We get the impression that there'll be a lot of this sort of thing going on.

AUTO ASSAULT
PC



"ALTHOUGH AUTO ASSAULT MAY BE CHANGING MANY OF THE ELEMENTS THAT EXISTING MMORPG FANS HAVE BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO, WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING HOW THE FRESH APPROACH WORKS OUT"

If you run away from your problems, they will come and find you with cars and guns. Fact.

A LITTLE RESPECT

Most MMORPGs will give you a fair range of characters but *Auto Assault* will place the character types you know and love into three races. Before you choose what part you want to play on the battlefield, you'll need to pick between these races and it's going to be a decision that will dramatically shape your gaming experience.

BIOMEKS

When Humans started to be bothered by Mutants they turned to Biomeks to help them out. Enhanced by technology, these Humans were left on the surface while everyone else hid underground. Not happy about this, the Biomeks have turned on their masters and developed their own civilisation. They're unimpressed by fancy looks and prefer to concentrate on efficiency over style. These guys mean business and are likely to be a popular choice.

HUMANS

After failing to rid the Earth of Mutants, the Humans retreated underground. Upon their return they found the Mutants had become an even greater threat. Now deciding to take action themselves rather than relying on Biomeks, they have salvaged alien technology to protect themselves from contamination and attacks. More technologically advanced than the Mutants but not as much as the Biomeks, Humans are a sort of middle ground.

MUTANTS

An alien attack on Earth caused a mystery substance to infect the land; the Humans who were exposed to it turned into these green monsters. After a failed attempt by the Humans to wipe them out, the Mutants have thrived. The substance behind the transformation is the foundation of their religion and gives them powers that enable healing and space manipulation. Mutant vehicles harness this substance, making this race a good choice for those fond of the quirkier things in life.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ NCsoft is one of the leading online game companies and has provided some damn fine MMORPG experiences. Since being set up in 1997, NCsoft has worked towards reaching a global market and today it has branched out from Korea to North America, Japan, China and Taiwan.

HISTORY

- GUILD WARS 2005 [PC]
- CITY OF HEROES 2005 [PC]
- LINEAGE II 2004 [PC]

■ Customising your vehicle isn't just about looking good; you'll not get far without some decent weapons.

"EVEN AFTER PLAYING FOR THOUSANDS OF HOURS, I STILL FIND MYSELF BLOWING THE SHIT OUT OF EVERYTHING"
RYAN SEABURY, DESIGN DIRECTOR, NETDEVIL

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE RIDE OF YOUR LIFE

CITY OF HEROES - POWERS + WHEELS = AUTO ASSAULT

■ Environments will vary depending on whose territory you're fighting in. They all look pretty, though.

out at once and maximise your XP payout. This is how everyone's playing it now – we're dangling an extra treat and people want it. It's the fun of the game and that's where this game will shine."

Another feature that looks likely to sell *Auto Assault* to the masses is the rather complex approach to loot. Firstly, NetDevil has implemented a dynamic system. "This means the same item may drop on multiple occasions, but it'll have different stats each time," Seabury explains. "Let's say the 'super gun of doom' appears and it's got a range of 50 metres – next time it may have 55 metres but a little less firepower. This means although you may have the weapon you want, you can keep farming for it in the hope you'll get stats that are better suited to you."

It's certainly interesting, and is bound to cause fans hours of pain as they search for that 'little bit better' item, but it doesn't end there. Thanks to the series of Disciplines that are on offer there are multiple ways to improve and create weaponry. By studying broken items that you stumble upon – assuming you've invested your time correctly – you can learn recipes to build the studied objects from raw materials. Adding your own ingredients to the mix when building is also possible and, although it introduces the chance of failure and loss of an object, it can theoretically lead to the discovery of something rare or even unique.

"If you find something really cool and manage to memorise and change it you may be the only person on the server that can make that object," Seabury says excitedly. Although this is bound to lead to many items turning up on eBay for stupid prices, we have to admit that we're quite excited about it too – especially as this is only one area of the Disciplines.

Although *Auto Assault* is obviously an MMOPRG, during our time with NetDevil we couldn't help but overhear the phrase 'massively single-player' thrown around – what's that all about? "It's a joke we use around the office," Seabury tells us. "And it's because we found that many people who play MMOs actually play solo. What's cool about MMO games is that it allows you to form a party with other players, what's not cool is when it's required to advance. There's a level of frustration that we've experienced personally when we've had to find a group that suited the mission we were trying to complete." We know this pain well, and anyone who's reached the final areas of *Guild Wars* as a Necromancer and found that nobody wants to play with them due to their uselessness in areas void of corpses will be glad to hear of NetDevil's intentions.

"We really didn't want *Auto Assault* to be like this." Seabury continues. "Every character class is very self-sufficient and the design goal was to make the game entirely 'solo-able' and to have the party options only to enhance the experience. There will definitely be areas that will be easier with a group, but you won't become stuck if you can't find one."

Auto Assault is certainly looking to be brimming with interesting features, and although it changes many of the elements that existing MMORPG fans have become accustomed to, we're looking forward to seeing whether this high-action approach will deliver everything it promises.



ROBOTS IN DISGUISE

Auto Assault certainly won't be the first game to implement a 'Hazard mode' system, but this one's certainly looking quite special. Each of the three races will possess their own unique way to dish out maximum damage, so with just a click of the mouse the Human vehicles can shield themselves and blast enemies by way of satellite link-up, while the Mutants can manipulate space to rip their foes apart. As nice as these moves are, it's the Biomeks that will be armed with the most crowd-pleasing manoeuvre. In the middle of a tough battle you'll be able to transform their vehicles into robots for a short period of time. Which has got to be a boon in rush-hour traffic as well…

TALK THE TALK

With all the action taking place from inside a vehicle, this is going to be the fastest moving MMORPG to date. Because of this there are going to be some key gameplay differences between this title and others in the genre. One of these will be the way you're automatically thrown into spoken conversation with your party when you embark on a mission. With things moving at such a pace, the thought of having time to start tapping away on your keyboard to relay the location of a particular pick-up is a foolish one. It's going to be headsets all the way if you want to get anywhere in this game.



There certainly aren't too many MMORPGs that feature this level of destruction. Thanks, Havok.

THE GODFATHER



"DEPENDING ON HOW YOU CHOOSE TO PLAY THE GAME, BY VIOLENT OR INTIMIDATING MEANS OR RESPECTFUL OR NEGOTIATING MEANS, THE CHARACTERS WILL REMEMBER YOUR INTERACTIONS"

EA PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LOOKING BACK IT'S SO BIZARRE – IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

GTA: SAN ANDREAS - HOT COFFEE + CORRECT SPELLING OF GANGSTER = THE GODFATHER

These are the streets you roam. They are – quite literally, mate – mean.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Yeah, it's EA – stop booing. In these last few years, Electronic Arts has picked up its game and made some choice acquisitions as well as really improving its internal output. Well, apart from those silly games listed here, anyway.

HISTORY

- FIFA STREET 2005 [Multi]
- GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT 2004 [Multi]
- NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2003 [Multi]





It might look like Brando but his voice might sound a little off to those in the know.

Don Vito had the last laugh when he stepped out to reveal his Bermuda shorts.

"A MAN THAT DOESN'T SPEND TIME WITH HIS FAMILY CAN NEVER BE A REAL MAN"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, Xbox 360, PC, PSP
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Live a life of evil in the shadow of one of the most famous fictional crime bosses of all time. Then work your way up and replace him as king of New York's gangland underworld. Sounds all too easy…

Whenever a publisher snaps up the rights to another ageing movie property that doesn't lend itself to a game, take a close look at your console. See that? It gave a little Xbox shudder. Microsoft never intended its consoles to be violated with a platform collectathon based on *The Goonies* and you should be right to fear this kind of filth. Sometimes, though, a game can take an unexpected licence and make it shine. But when it comes to *The Godfather*, any mistakes on EA's part could see it sleeping with the fishes.

Mob analogies aside, this game's Respect Points system looks to be fairly well implemented. Knocking a guy off from across the street will reap a few points while an up-close public execution will really get the family talking about your deeds. But it's the way other characters react to your actions that stands out. With every gang member and civilian operating on a system of needs, wants and fears (an idea lifted from *The Sims 2*), reactions to whatever you do will vary from person to person for most actions. Start waving a gun around and many passers by will run for their lives, with only the odd wannabe hero or passing mobster standing their ground or even reaching for their own piece.

Earn enough respect from the family and you'll be able to drop your character into familiar scenarios from the film by way of missions that tie into the plot – the narrative is bent slightly so that your character is involved in some of the key events in place of another, and much of the game's success is likely to hinge on these cinematic homages gelling with the newly created elements.

Combat is well handled through a fully analogue system, allowing you to throw items where you want, dish out as much punishment as you feel is necessary or make sure that your unfortunate victim is made to live through his excruciating pain as a barely walking example to everyone who dares stand up to you. Which, as it happens, is quite handy.

As you gallivant around the Godfather universe's New York City you'll have to stamp your mark on institutions and other families in whatever way you can – negotiations are the peaceful way to grow your empire or you can pressure, mutilate and extort your way onto the payroll of the city's businesses. But karma is rife in the Big Apple and you can expect your chosen method of personal betterment to be used against you as well. The power of persuasion is all well and good but just bear in mind that the competition isn't likely to play fair.

If you can put a little distance between game and licence, *The Godfather* does look to be a solid title in its own right. A slew of good ideas mean that so long as they're integrated well, the elements should gel to make a stylish and coherent mob-'em-up. Of course, some people can't see beyond the fact that EA has taken what is seen as one of the best films of all time and turned it into an action-driven game. All we'd say is don't write it off just yet – if the extra time in development pays off, this will be worth a look, even if you are among those who feel the need to look away during the cut-scenes.

"NEGOTIATIONS ARE THE PEACEFUL WAY TO GROW YOUR EMPIRE OR YOU CAN EXTORT YOUR WAY ONTO THE PAYROLL OF THE CITY'S BUSINESSES"

IS THAT LIKE A POKER FACE?

Another direct and easy lift for EA has been the Game Face technology from *Tiger Woods*, rebranded 'Mob Face' here and used to create the new face of organised crime. You'll start out in somewhat plain clothes – you're only a lowly droog, after all – and earn the right to a better wardrobe and a sharp line of hats as you progress. In keeping with the fiction, you'll be limited to creating a Caucasian male but outside of that his body is your plaything. Make a short, dumpy gangster or perhaps just the world's ugliest mobster in a silly hat. The choice is yours and we intend to fully exploit this feature just as soon as we can.

WITHOUT WARNING

THIS ONE JUST CAME OUT OF NOWHERE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Circle Studio
RELEASE: 28 Oct '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Take on and eliminate another terrorist threat by using of the unique skills of six very different characters.

PS2 **First off, you need to know that Circle Studios is largely made up of the same minds that resided at Core Design – the studio responsible for bringing us a certain busty aristocrat who had a tendency to raid tombs.** Now, with a few mistakes and a few of instalments of a hugely successful series behind them, they're back again with *Without Warning* and, interestingly, Circle has teamed up with an unlikely force to mark its re-entry into the industry – Capcom.

We say unlikely, as this move sees Capcom straying far from what it knows best – namely Japanese-developed titles. Whereas it may have been a risk publishing games such as *killer7* and *Viewtiful Joe* in the UK, it's always paid off and these launches have served the company well over the last couple of years. With this in mind, it's a strange move for it to join with UK studio Circle – even more so when the title concerned is certainly no parade of innovation, but just a traditional third-person action game.

The first thing that needs to be mentioned regarding the title is its key feature – a 12-hour clock. The entire game will take place within this time period and as the action progresses you'll find yourself switching between characters, frequently flitting back and forth through the hours, and often seeing overlapping time periods just to make sure you experience the terrifying terrorist attack on the game's setting of a chemical plant from every possible angle.

And that's pretty much it for gimmicky features. In fact, the only other element that could be considered unique is the lack of complexity *Without Warning* looks set to feature. Each character has access to one weapon only and, from what we've played, gameplay revolves either around shooting hordes of enemies while pursuing an objective, just like in most other titles in the genre, or slightly more stealth-based sections where you have to rely on tools such as fire extinguishers to take out single enemies who stand between you and progression – it really is as simple as that.

Exactly which of the forms the gameplay takes depends greatly on which of the six characters you're controlling at the time. Three of these characters make up the anti-terrorist squad and are armed appropriately with the most efficient weapons for disposing of bad guys and have the skills needed to cut the right wire in a bomb situation. These disarming/unlocking 'mini-games' are actually implemented well, taking the form of real tasks rather than the usual routines that we're used to seeing in other stealth and action titles – they make you feel as if you've achieved something rather than simply overcoming another hindrance.

The remaining characters take a far less aggressive form and come in the shape of a security guard, a secretary and a roving news reporter who have all become trapped inside the facility for various reasons, and it's when using these three that the second gameplay type features and you'll have to adapt accordingly – something which is unlikely to cause too much grief due to us all having managed it before with similar titles.

Whether *Without Warning*'s focus on simplicity and playability will succeed at a time where most developers are forcing every last drop out of the existing consoles in preparation for the next gen is debatable. Although likely to be accessible, playable and fun, it's usually these non-offensive titles that slip so easily under the radar and – with this game holding the potential that it does – it would be a shame if it disappeared.

EYES FRONT, SOLDIER

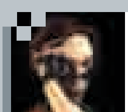
Although the action all takes place from a third-person viewpoint, *Without Warning* will actually dabble a little in the first-person side of things. The aiming cursor will always face towards the action, which means that it doesn't matter whether you're charging into battle or fleeing from the destruction, you'll always have a good view of what's going on. Better still, a squeeze of the trigger will see your character snap round and face whatever commotion is taking place and start firing at a target. It a handy feature and as long as Circle manages to get the balance between the two analogue sticks sorted, it should help to create some frantic gameplay.

"WITHOUT WARNING'S LACK OF COMPLEXITY IS A FAIRLY UNIQUE FEATURE IN THE GAME"



■ The enemies swarm in when you're a soldier; they thin out a bit if you're a less capable character.

■ Explosions, guns and dead bad guys – which bit of this don't you understand?



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ The founders of Circle Studio are none other than Jeremy and Adrian Smith, the brothers who set up Core Design and worked on the first few *Tomb Raider* titles. When creating their new studio they managed to put a team together which contains about half of their old Core employees.

HISTORY

- **TOMB RAIDER III** 1999 [Multi]
- **TOMB RAIDER II** 1998 [Multi]
- **TOMB RAIDER** 1996 [Multi]

■ You also get to play as a reporter trying to get his biggest scoop ever. Fool.

■ See, the civilian characters don't get all the gun-based, shooty fun, so enjoy it while you can…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

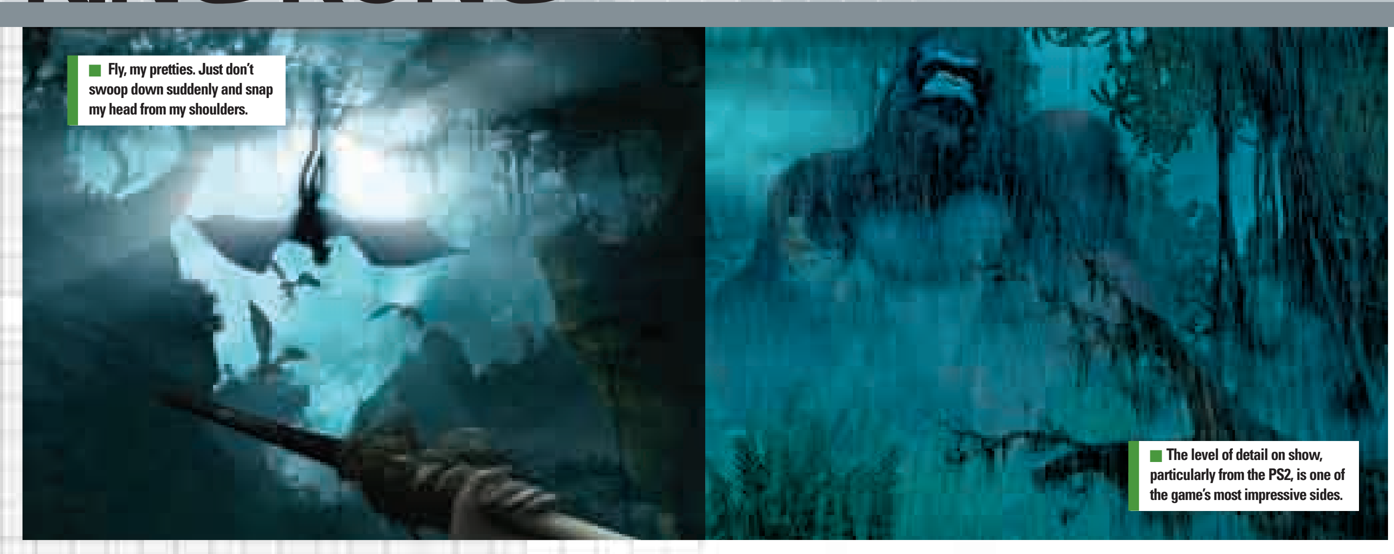
PICK UP AND PLAY

RAINBOW SIX 3 - COMPLEXITY + SIMPLICITY = WITHOUT WARNING

"WITHOUT WARNING HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO IMMEDIATELY THROW THE PLAYER INTO HIGHLY CHARGED, VOLATILE ENVIRONMENTS"

CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG



Fly, my pretties. Just don't swoop down suddenly and snap my head from my shoulders.

The level of detail on show, particularly from the PS2, is one of the game's most impressive sides.

MONKEY BUSINESS LOOKS SET TO PAY FOR UBISOFT

Think 'games of films' and the emotions that rise to the surface run from apathy to disgust. The track record of such conversions, a few notable exceptions aside, is poor to say the least and this didn't bode well for *King Kong* when it was first announced. However, that was before the game was actually shown, before the world went bananas for the oversized ape. This is no exaggeration either, because every second of the game that has been shown so far suggests that the Peter Jackson Midas touch has finally found its way to the games industry.

The game is split into two distinct types of gameplay as players take control of both main characters in the story – adventurer Jack Driscoll and King Kong himself. There was always going to be some sort of first-person adventure element to Ubisoft's game, but few will have predicted that the team would make the bold move to allow gamers to step into Kong's size 50s.

Most of the footage so far suggests that the bulk of the player's time will be spent as Jack Driscoll as he and his crew of explorers and film-makers attempt to survive the prehistoric dangers of Skull Island while having a crack at snatching Ann Darrow back from the furry clutches of Kong. Those who know the basic plot of the film will probably be able to guess that some sort of footage-capturing work will be involved during the human sections, as the eager director of the party asks his crew to get as much of the adventure on film as possible. Aside from these few distractions the rest of the Driscoll side of the game appears to be about surviving at all costs in the brutal, dino-infested jungle.

Combat already looks hugely impressive as players are forced to scramble for anything they can lay their hands on in order to fend off foes. This means rocks, pointed sticks, spears and a handful of authentic-looking firearms are your only defence against some seriously intimidating creatures. Few games offer the chance to face off against a full-sized T-Rex from the first-person perspective while carrying a rusty Tommy gun and only a fistful of bullets, and this is going to be a major part of what will lift *King Kong* above the slew of predictable releases rushed out in time for Christmas. Well, this and the fact that players will be able to control Kong himself for some serious reptile-bashing action…

If the combat of the Driscoll sections is savage, then the giant gorilla parts of the game showcase some downright epic fights. The footage that's already been shown sees Kong facing off against the gigantic T-Rex that was causing some concern to Driscoll's party moments ago, and this time the fighting happens in a cinematic third-person view. King Kong can dish out some heavy blows as a playable character, and the melee combat during these sections involves some brutal punching, slamming, biting and kicking.

After making short work of T-Rex, Kong is called upon to rescue Ann who's been cornered by another couple of dinos. Reaching the fight involves completing a novel platform section that sees monkey-boy swinging through the jungle using vines, cliff-faces and tree branches to propel himself along, a little like the control employed in *Spider-Man 2*. Once there, the fighting continues and Kong pulls open the jaws of his opponents and rips the lizards in half to finish them off. Ouch.

King Kong is visceral, beautiful and superbly varied. It seems the rule book for film-to-game conversions is finally being rewritten. It's about bloody time…

"THE RULE BOOK FOR FILM-TO-GAME CONVERSIONS IS FINALLY BEING REWRITTEN"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, Cube, PC, X360, PSP, DS, GBA
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montpellier
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

The game of the film, obviously, sees players taking control of both the wannabe filmmakers and Kong himself.

EXTREME SURVIVAL

The combat engine for the Driscoll parts of the game has been ingeniously designed to really create the feeling that the player can try anything to survive. There's no annoying HUD showing health bars or ammo counts, only an arm and a weapon – if you have one, that is (a weapon, not an arm). The whole team element has been geared towards helping rather than heroics, so this means players can call upon buddies to toss them a weapon or help out with pulling a lever to open gates for the rest of the party and so on. Another neat little trick is the ability to use fire to your team's advantage, as setting a spear alight and using it to ignite the surrounding jungle will often be the best way to escape from pursuers.

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG
XBOX/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Having worked on the thoroughly original and entertaining *Beyond Good & Evil*, the Ubisoft Montpellier team is no stranger to creating something bold, colourful and above all magical. *XIII* displayed similar imagination, if only graphically rather than in terms of execution.

HISTORY

- **XIII** 2003 [Multi]
- **BEYOND GOOD & EVIL** 2003 [Multi]
- **RAYMAN 3** 2002 [Multi]

If this doesn't get your gaming heart pounding then you, sir, are officially dead.

Kong, smash. Not exactly a moment of Hulk proportions, but pretty close.

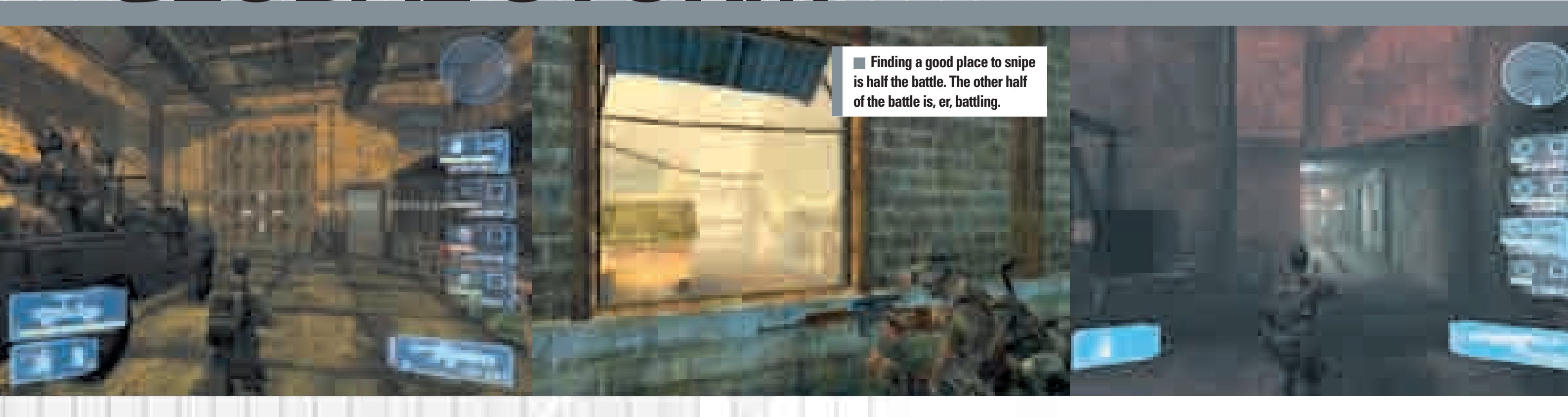
"A VIDEOGAME THAT WILL CAPTURE THE IMAGINATION, VISION AND EMOTION OF THE EPIC FILM"
UBISOFT PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GORILLA THRILLER

PETER JACKSON + APES x ADVENTURE = KING KONG

CONFLICT: GLOBAL STORM



Finding a good place to snipe is half the battle. The other half of the battle is, er, battling.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Pivotal Games
RELEASE: Sept '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

The fourth instalment of the successful *Conflict* series is set in the near future, letting you play with ultra-modern combat and weaponry.

THE REAL WAR OF THE WORLDS

After two enjoyable reccies in the Iraqi desert, the *Conflict* series had a somewhat tortuous tour of duty in Vietnam. Thankfully, Eidos is set to shake off those thousand-yard stares, with the recently renamed *Global Storm* taking the franchise back to its roots.

The original *Desert Storm* team of Foley, Jones, Connors and Bradley is back in town. This time, however, it's a clan of neo-nazi terrorists they're after – a handy way to avoid controversy by removing all talk of Middle Eastern villains while still cashing in on the world's number-one issue: global terror. The combat is pitched in modern-day environments reminiscent of those in *Killzone* – gritty, urban locales in stark contrast to the bleached desert or badly textured jungles of the past. In fact, the graphics are looking a great deal sharper.

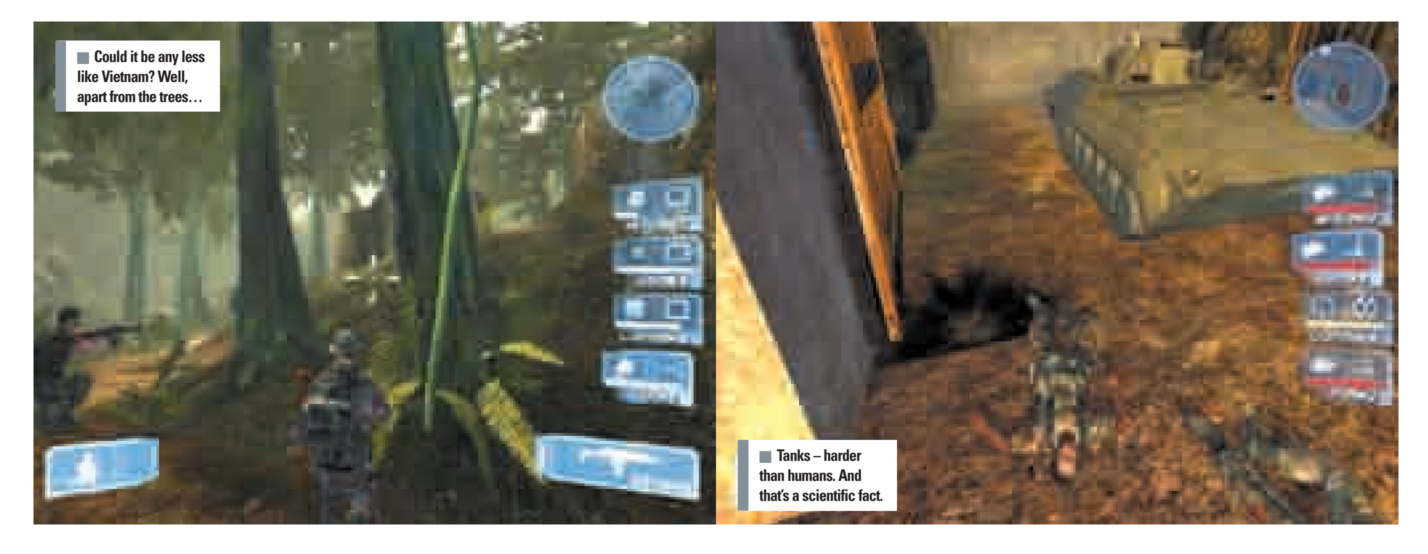
The main talking point, however, is the improved AI. Whereas previously your allies could often be seen standing idly next to a primed grenade or wandering into no-man's land, tighter scripting has all but banished these foibles, making for a much smoother experience. More exciting is the unpredictability of the enemies. No two encounters will ever play out in the same way, so it's possible to see opponents diving for cover, charging into the open or working in teams to outflank your squad.

However, the early code still needs some fine-tuning as there are a few instances of enemy soldiers acting in unusual ways, such as careering around in a circle when confronted. These occasional occurrences are all the more noticeable when compared to the behaviour of the game's more intelligent soldiers, instantly putting a large crack in any suspension of disbelief the player may experience.

But what the *Conflict* series has always done well is combat, and *Global Storm* offers a more streamlined, squad-based system than before. The use of a context-sensitive action for healing, one-button grenade throwing (à la *Halo*) and handy drop-down menus for directing your team-mates allows for a more tactical style of play than before, and the joy in out-thinking the enemy AI is as pleasurable as ever.

> "GLOBAL STORM OFFERS A MORE STREAMLINED COMBAT SYSTEM"

Ultimately then, it looks as though Pivotal is primed to continue the series' commercial success and reclaim the critical acceptance that disappeared deep in the Vietnam jungle. Hallelujah to that.



Could it be any less like Vietnam? Well, apart from the trees…

Tanks – harder than humans. And that's a scientific fact.


eMag

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED



■ This is what you're aiming for: that magical moment where you finally get to drive this beauty.

"WE WANT TO REDEFINE RACING ONLINE"

STÉPHANE BAUDET, EDEN GAMES

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SWAPPING BLING FOR GRASS SKIRTS

NEED FOR SPEED - CHAVS + HAWAII = TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

■ There really is no such thing as too much Turtle Wax. Unless you're drinking it, of course.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Based in Lyon, France, Eden Games is most famous for its *V-Rally* series, as well as having developed *Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed* and *Kya: Dark Lineage*. With *Test Drive Unlimited* Eden Games intends to put this once-popular series (now in its eighth instalment) back on the map.

HISTORY

- KYA: DARK LINEAGE 2004 [PS2]
- NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED 2000 [PSone]
- V-RALLY 1997 [PSone]

GOODBYE LIFE, ALOHA HAWAII



The next generation will herald the massively multiplayer online (MMO) revolution. PC gamers are already embracing the trend, with MMORPG *World Of Warcraft* attracting 3.5 million subscribers. That's 3.5 million people paying to spend hours questing online. Most games don't sell 3.5 million copies, let alone keep players paying every month for the privilege of losing their social life to a game. This sort of thing is the future.

So why stop at games where people wander around killing orcs? Considering fancy racing titles tend to fill the upper regions of the charts, surely these are the perfect games to push the MMO trend? And considering all Xbox 360 online titles will be subscription free under the Silve' plan, why stop at 3.5 million players?

This is Eden Games' thought with *Test Drive Unlimited*, a racing game that boasts a permanent online connection, practically limitless upgradeability and a club and league system that gives players a genuine sense of purpose as well as a whole range of achievable goals so they don't get overwhelmed by intense competition. Taking place in an almost fully recreated version of Hawaii, boasting 1,000 miles of authentic road, *Test Drive Unlimited* basically allows players to race each other as well as form or join clubs.

Thanks to an all-new lobby system, players drive around in the island space meeting and challenging other players rather than facing a 'room' of names. Instead of having thousands of players viewable, however, you're only able to see 15 other racers. The online system that refreshes four times a second is constantly deciding who you see and don't see based on specific criteria such as skill level, location on the map, spoken language and preferred game modes. This matchmaking ensures that you meet and play people who share your tastes and play at your level. Amusingly, this system also lumps together gamers who get bad feedback, preventing them from bothering decent players.

Should you tire of driving and searching, you can form or join a club and arrange 16-player races where you set the rules and mode. For instance, as well as traditional 'first to finish' races you can also have challenges where the winner is the person who reaches the highest speed. Then you can add rules, such as no braking or a minimum speed in certain sections. With regular club races, plus inter-club face-offs, there's always something to win. And this goes for everyone. A league system that groups players and clubs of certain skills ensures anyone can become champion of something, even if it is the 120th division…

This is all just scratching the surface of Eden Games' ambition for *Test Drive Unlimited*, and with all the effort being put in this could be as big as any of the current online RPGs. The only things standing in the way are the popularity of the Xbox 360 – and, indeed, Live – and Eden Games' ability to make the car handling and racing as fun and boundary-pushing as everything else sounds like it will be. The quality of the actual racing is slightly worrying right now, but there's still time. Let's just hope the time is spent properly; if not, this could be the biggest waste in gaming history. Like inventing the Ferrari and then giving it square wheels.

"ONLINE MATCHMAKING ENSURES THAT YOU MEET AND PLAY PEOPLE WHO SHARE YOUR TASTES AND PLAY AT YOUR LEVEL"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Eden Games
RELEASE: March '06
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 16

CONCEPT

■ It's like going on holiday to Hawaii, except it's happening on your TV and you're actually sitting in your pants at home surrounded by empty Pot Noodle cartons.

GOT, GOT, NEED, GOT…

With any racing game it's all about the cars, and *Test Drive Unlimited* is no exception. Not only are these stunning digital recreations of the real things, with even the interiors being startlingly lifelike, and not only do they even sound like the real thing (right down to the sound of shutting the doors), but you can trade the cars and upgrades with other players. Some cars and upgrades will be rare and released via Xbox Live (making them extremely valuable) and to encourage virtual trading, Eden Games is creating an eBay-esque trading system. Virtual trading culture surrounding online PC games is massive, with some players spending real money to get rare items and resorting to real murder following virtual theft… Let's hope this doesn't go that far.



■ Despite showing off the impressive car interior, we found this mode a bit cumbersome.

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

IT'S ELDER AND IT'S DEFINITELY BETTER

Once upon a time there was a gallant knight named Sir Peter Molyneux. Good sir knight foretold of a videogame that would redefine the role-playing game; a game so open-ended and free-roaming it would offer an experience unlike any other. Sadly, the game of which sir knight spoke really was a fable, as it wasn't close to being the genre-buster he had proclaimed. Among the many reasons for its diminished impact was that another game had beaten it to the punch – a game that genuinely did open avenues in RPG gaming like no other before it. That game was *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, and it was nothing short of a revelation.

And here we are again, in a situation not too dissimilar; on the horizon is *Fable: The Lost Chapters*, once more proclaiming itself gaming's premier RPG. Only this time it's the new *Elder Scrolls* adventure, *Oblivion*, that's making all the noise, turning all the heads, and that's sure to deliver on every count of brilliance and every instance of unabashed bravado.

Still, with almost three years in development, *Oblivion* has more than just pedigree in its favour. With 60,000 lines of dialogue, over 1,000 NPCs, more than 200 hand-built dungeons and 16 square miles of living game world, there's little doubt that this will be the most vast and open-ended RPG ever created. And, while celebrity involvement is in no way a barometer of greatness (especially when said celebrity was also involved in the criminally average *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone*), the vocal contributions of Patrick Stewart add tremendous weight to the grandness of *Oblivion*'s tale.

Taking place primarily in Cyrodiil, the capital province of the land of Tamriel, the story sees an emperor die, leaving his fragile empire on the verge of collapse. With timing that befits such tales, the very gates of hell itself – the 'Oblivion' of the title – are flung open and demons storm the realm. Your role, among many other open and branching quests, is to locate the lost heir to Tamriel's throne and banish the darkness back from whence it came. Well, you can't spell 'predictable' without 'e-p-i-c'.

Once again, it's the minutiae that make the game world a living, breathing reality. Let's start with those 1,000 NPCs; each one is programmed with Radiant AI to make him or her an independent, living being. Individual daily routines see characters hunting, shopping, even pickpocketing. Couple this with dynamic responses dependent on the circumstances that see NPCs engage in unscripted conversations (where they might relate to each other developments in the game world, which you can eavesdrop) or idiosyncrasies in their behavioural traits (characters who play with their pets might tire of the animal's chatter and cast spells to shut them up) and you'll meet characters more vivid and alive than any you've met before.

A teleport ensures that the only backtracking required is that which you deem necessary, and the introduction of a compass to guide you to key items as well as target destinations means that *Morrowind*'s annoying habit of object misplacement is a thing of the past.

Add to that the prospect of horse riding, the requisite *Elder Scrolls* Guilds that often work at cross purposes (forcing you to make careful allegiances – for every action a consequence, indeed) and Bethesda's embracing of the modding community by including a full construction set (which will lend itself perfectly to the 360's much-ballyhooed Live functionality) and you can see why *Elder Scrolls* is set to make history again.

> "IT'S THE MINUTIAE THAT MAKE THE GAME WORLD A LIVING, BREATHING REALITY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Bethesda
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

The latest instalment of the *Elder Scrolls* series promises vaster worlds, interactive environments and elements, dynamic character interaction and a breathtaking visual overhaul.

GETTING PHYSICAL

One aspect of *Oblivion* that's seen particular evolution is the combat system. At times, combat in *Morrowind* could degenerate into mere button-bashing. No more. In addition to an improved combat mechanic, smoother animations and more visceral camera work, the dungeons and environments are now interactive. Not only can you set environmental traps, but should you fire an arrow into a hanging item such as a bucket it will sway and hang askew under the weight of the projectile, which you can then pry loose and use again. These physics also have a bearing on certain character classes – thieves, for example, will be able to exploit distractions and discarded items.



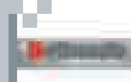
With an improved combat mechanic and better animation, it's time to get properly medieval.

What's worse than meeting him in a dark alley? Meeting him a dark tomb with only a torch for a weapon.

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PC/MULTIFORMAT

DEVELOPER PROFILE



Bethesda Softworks' track record is certainly interesting. Its most (in)famous titles are the lame *Terminator* games from the Nineties, but it also made four drag racers, three ice hockey games and a *Where's Waldo?* title. Thank God for *Elder Scrolls* and *Call Of Cthulhu*.

HISTORY

- **CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH** 2005 [Multi]
- **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN** 2003 [Multi]
- **THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND** 2002 [Multi]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LIVING IN OBLIVION

FABLE + DOOM 3 + GRAND THEFT AUTO = ELDER SCROLLS IV

"UNRAVEL THE MAIN QUEST AT YOUR OWN PACE OR EXPLORE THE VAST WORLD AND FIND YOUR OWN CHALLENGES"

2K GAMES PRESS RELEASE

Riding your horse saves on shoe leather as you explore every inch of the 16 square miles of game world.

APE ESCAPE 3

SOFTLY, SOFTLY NOW…



Go on, tell us this doesn't look amazing. We won't believe you.

Of all Sony's franchises, *Ape Escape* must be one of our favourites. You'd be hard pushed to find any other titles that allow you to chase a horde of monkeys around with a net, so obviously we're excited about getting face-to-face with the developer's latest batch of errant apes.

Possibly the biggest improvement in gameplay is the way in which the costumes will be implemented. Although various outfits have been available before, switching them has just been an opportunity to decorate the characters and has never really had a practical use – something that Sony has opted to change in this latest title. Along with the vehicles and gadgets that are available, these costumes will grant the wearer extra abilities and will prove essential if you want to grab every one of the nippy chimps.

Also, the outfits will only be accessible for a limited amount of time when you manage to fill your costume meter, so tactical use will be important if you want to see every part of a stage. This should ensure that *Ape Escape 3* boasts many more possibilities than any of its forerunners – and that's really saying something considering the greatness the series has provided so far.

"APE ESCAPE 3 SHOULD BOAST MANY MORE POSSIBILITIES THAN ANY OF ITS FORERUNNERS"

Although dressing characters in different attire is always going to be a crowd-pleaser, by far our favourite new element has to be the way monkeys can get revenge on you for your netting ways. If you're not careful, the monkey you're attempting to catch will swipe your net and give chase. We're sure we're not alone in suffering a recurring 'trapped by giant monkey' dream, and being snared by a rampaging chimp means it's game over for you. Sure, it's not a huge gameplay-enhancing element but it's certainly amusing, and even though you can nab your net back with a swift bap from your sword, it'll be fun seeing the tables turned.

When it comes down to it, we already know that *Ape Escape 3* is going to be more of the same with a couple of new features tagged on, but judging by the success of the previous games, this is no bad thing. We're sure it'll be worth setting aside a little more time to round up a few extra monkeys when we finally get a PAL release.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Platform
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Catch yourself another batch of runaway monkeys.



New moves and new outfits will make gathering those apes much more interesting.





We have no idea why catching monkeys is still fun after so long. It just is.


eMag

COMPANY OF HEROES



■ Every single building in the game can be destroyed, in real time.

■ The game promises intense cinematic moments mixed with hardcore strategy.

"EXPERIENCE THE CINEMATIC INTENSITY, COURAGE AND BRAVERY OF THE HEROES THAT DEFINED A GENERATION"

THQ PRESS RELEASE

COMPANY OF HEROES
PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Relic shot to fame in 1999 with its acclaimed PC strategy title *Homeworld*. The studio has since released a sequel, along with the successful Games Workshop-based RTS game *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War*. *Company Of Heroes* is its latest, and quite possibly greatest, foray into the strategy genre.

HISTORY

■ WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR 2004 [PC]
■ HOMEWORLD 2 2003 [PC]
■ HOMEWORLD 1999 [PC]



■ Graphically, *Company Of Heroes* is light years ahead of everything else in the genre.

REAL-TIME STRATEGY SO REAL IT'S UNREAL

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Relic
RELEASE: 2006
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-8

CONCEPT

■ Relic, not content with making another solid and fun RTS, has tried to revolutionise the genre again, creating a uniquely cinematic experience in the process.

As popular as the real-time strategy genre is, there's no doubt it comes with a stigma attached. It's the realm of the PC gamer who isn't concerned with flashy graphics, cut-scenes or the need to be 'cool'. And there's nothing wrong with that. Some of the best PC games of the last few years have been of the RTS variety. However, Relic has decided that the genre needs a shake-up, and with *Company Of Heroes* the studio is aiming to completely redefine the RTS experience as we know it.

The most immediate impact comes from the visuals. A casual observer would be forgiven for thinking that these screens are from the latest World War II FPS, such is the detail in the character models and the now familiar bombed-out sites in rural France. Of course, this would mean nothing if the game was nothing more than a pretty face, so you can rest easy because Relic's latest title has several more tricks up its sleeve.

Firstly, everything on the battlefield can be destroyed. Everything. Memories of *Mercenaries* should be banished though, because these buildings don't just operate in two states (erect and destroyed), they react dynamically and realistically to the punishment they receive. For example, a tank shell may punch a great hole in a concrete wall or, dependent on trajectory and velocity, topple the entire structure.

Fascinatingly, the debris caused by this destruction also completely changes the battle surrounding it. If you bomb an enemy stronghold then the remaining opposition soldiers will find cover behind the rubble that's been left behind. Or, should your troops be camped near a church tower, you'd better hope the enemy doesn't focus its attacks on the tower's supporting structures or your platoon could soon be much closer to God.

Relic promises that no two battles will ever play out in the same way as the constantly changing battlefield can turn the tide of war in the blink of an eye. The AI, a crucial element of any RTS, is more than up to the task of adapting to this ultra-realistic plane of conflict.

It's undeniably satisfying to see a group of AI-controlled soldiers intelligently reacting to the realisation that their last line of protection from a barrage of artillery fire has just been shattered. Some games would see the troops standing their ground and returning fire before meeting their inevitable doom. Not *Company Of Heroes* – Relic is determined to offer a completely immersive experience, and to do so there must be no moments of AI stupidity. Be prepared to watch your soldiers desperately sprint towards anything that could be construed as cover, doing anything in their power to remain alive for just a few more seconds…

Although usually a staple of WWII games, the 'cinematic' approach is fairly new ground for the RTS genre. *Company Of Heroes* is clearly plucking at the same heart strings as *Brothers In Arms* – it wants the player to care about their troops, helped by a rousing orchestral score and a rich storyline accompanying the single-player campaign.

This new approach, mixed with the incredible impact of the visuals and physics, could see *Company Of Heroes* sitting firmly on top of the RTS pile for some time.

"WITH COMPANY OF HEROES, RELIC IS SET TO COMPLETELY REDEFINE THE RTS EXPERIENCE"

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

It might be a bit '2004' to get excited about a game's physics, but when they're this impressive it's understandable. Relic has come up with the Essence Engine, which apparently delivers "cinematic visual detail in a world completely driven by realistic physics". In other words, it combines stunning visuals with the latest iteration of Havok physics to create a playing field like nothing else. Watching a tank burst through a dry-stone wall, dragging debris with it, while panic-stricken soldiers scatter in all directions is like something straight out of *Band Of Brothers*. And it's in an RTS. The fact that the physics genuinely have an impact on the gameplay is one of *Company Of Heroes*' most exciting features.

DEVIL KINGS

"THAT NUMBER IS SIX HUNDRED AND SIXTY SIX…"

Looking at these *Devil Kings* screenshots, it's easy to make a few lazy comparisons. The one-man-army versus million-man-army slant, the fighting-for-control-of-the-battlefield gameplay, building a meter to unleash a more powerful attack… they're all hallmarks of *Devil Kings* and a certain other popular series by Koei. To some extent, Capcom appears to have its fingers crossed that you've never heard of *Dynasty Warriors*…

However, *Devil Kings* isn't tied to Eastern history so it's free to be more creative with its design than *Dynasty Warriors*. Witness *Devil Kings*' fondness for the absurd and willingness to push boundaries: the giant shogun warrior stomping on troops, the Russian doll-style minister with rocket launchers under his arms, and the femme fatale brandishing a mini-gun are early highlights of a game that may put the fun back into a niche genre that's growing stale.

You choose one of six heroes from different countries who make a pact with the devil to gain extraordinary power, and then bring calm to the land by hacking and slashing at everything in sight. Violence solves everything, it seems. *Dynasty Warriors*' Musou attack is adhered to in a Critical Move that's accessed by building up a meter, although *Devil Kings* promises to make these moves integral rather than leaving them as 'smart bombs' that are kept for when you run into trouble.

Kill counts can quickly run into the thousands and there's a mini-map that helps you work out where the next battle's going to be and in which direction you should be slashing. Again, no prizes for guessing which gaming series this is reminiscent of but this is also where the differences kick in.

Given *Devil Kings*' fantastical slant, Capcom can include more unusual weapons. Apart from the rocket launchers and mini-guns already mentioned, each character has a signature move; these range from using six swords to slice through enemies to summoning meteor storms. One character even boasts a sword and shotgun combination similar to Dante from *Devil May Cry* and although there's been no official word, there are murmurings that *Devil Kings* may have picked up a thing or two from Dante's games. While it's obvious *Devil May Cry*'s intricate combo system won't work in a title that's as much about fighting for survival as it is fighting with style, it will be interesting to see if *Devil Kings* avoids falling into the button-bashing trap.

> "DEVIL KINGS HAS A FONDNESS FOR THE ABSURD AND A WILLINGNESS TO PUSH BOUNDARIES"

It should also be noted that characters appear to be sporting a low-res, low-polygon-count look without sacrificing too much glamour. Does this mean Capcom is going for the functionality of a decent draw distance rather than bringing *Dynasty Warriors*' fogginess but short-sighted beauty to its new series? Looks like it…

But fogginess or not, top of Capcom's 'to do' list before *Devil Kings* hits Europe in early 2006 is to ensure the game ploughs a more original path. Otherwise it will live or die by its comparisons to the *Dynasty Warriors* series, which, despite its age, is still capable of fending off pretenders to its crown.

LEVEL UP!

***Devil Kings* will contain a healthy amount of levelling-up options, hopefully accompanied by a triumphant sparkly sound and glittery effects. Earn enough experience points during combat and you can level up your character or weapon. In addition to that, there are a hefty 80 special items to locate through the game, tucked away in hidden treasure chests. You can also unlock items and characters by meeting certain conditions during the missions. With all this talk of unlocking and levelling up, there's no denying that *Devil Kings* should have a long lifespan although, yet again, this is an idea that's been seen in the *Dynasty Warriors* series.**

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom Studio 4
RELEASE: Q1 '06 (US: Nov '05)
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Devil Kings combines *Dynasty Warriors*' strengths with Capcom's penchant for cool and funky design and emerges as a chaotic war-time slasher.



Allies will help when battles get too tense. Hopefully, they'll be able to look after themselves too.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Capcom has truly hit form, with *Devil May Cry 3*, *killer7* and *Resident Evil 4* living up to the hype and establishing the firm as one of the most consistent developers around. *Devil Kings* represents something of a departure for Capcom and will prove if it really does have the Midas touch.

HISTORY

- **RESIDENT EVIL 4** 2005 [Cube]
- **KILLER7** 2005 [Cube]
- **DEVIL MAY CRY 3** 2005 [PS2]

Whisper it… do the sluggish blurring effects mean there's going to be bullet time too?

Yes, it looks like *Dynasty Warriors*, but somehow a bit more… eccentric.

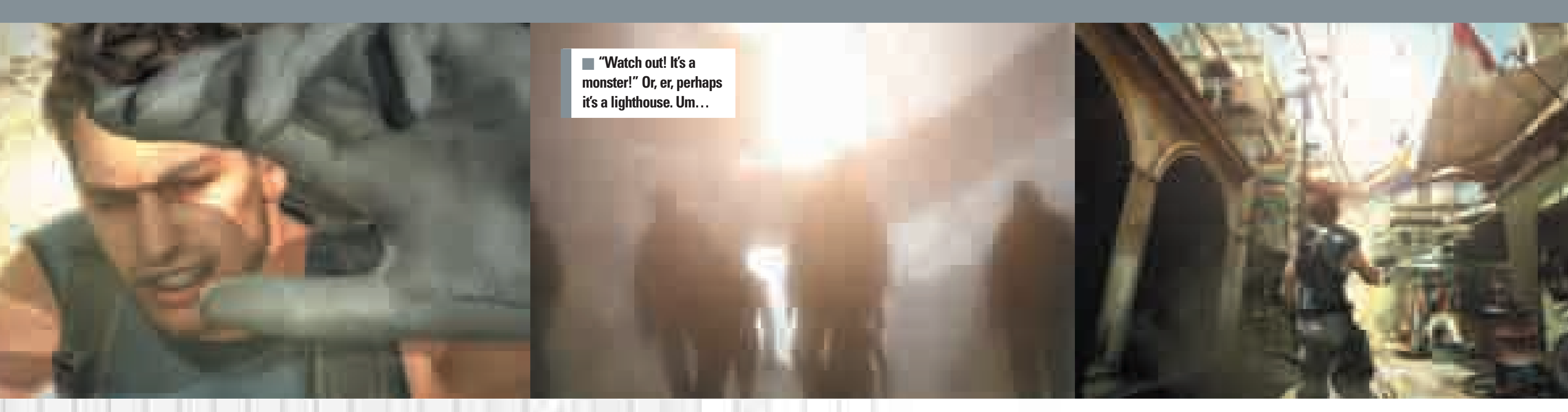
"THE ACTION EXPLODES ON-SCREEN WHEN AWESOME 'CRITICAL MOVES' ARE PERFORMED ON THE BATTLEFIELD"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

NOBUNAGA ODA DIDN'T HAVE ONE OF THOSE…

DYNASTY WARRIORS + ROCKET LAUNCHERS + MINI-GUNS = DEVIL KINGS

RESIDENT EVIL 5



"Watch out! It's a monster!" Or, er, perhaps it's a lighthouse. Um…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PS3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

First details have surfaced about the next-gen debut of (perhaps) the world's greatest videogame franchise. Awesome.

I HOPE IT'S NOT… CHRIS' BLOOD!

Shinji Mikami's incandescent survival horror series, *Resident Evil*, is one of the most influential reference points in the history of videogames. As it reaches its tenth anniversary, the announcement of a fifth proper instalment is as welcome as the PlayStation original.

The most recent incarnation, *Resident Evil 4*, took the series – and the genre – in new directions and in doing so shot straight to the top of many a game player's 'game of the generation' list. It was an almost faultless title, delivering a kinetic, seamless experience that managed to retain the series' atmosphere while injecting a much-needed boost to the gameplay.

Resident Evil 5, due to appear on Xbox 360 and PlayStation3 next year (much to the dismay of Nintendo fans, we're sure), will arrive with massive expectations. Early signs look promising. The trailer is absolutely stunning, at times indistinguishable from a movie. Zombies look set to make a comeback; the four figures lurching ominously toward the camera bear a striking resemblance to the Shamblers of the series' past.

However, the next section of the trailer points towards another new direction for *Evil*. It seems like *Resi 5*'s theme could be 'escape'. Unlike *4*'s target practice, the (as yet unnamed) central character is seen sprinting furiously away from the shadows of some worryingly speedy zombies. These are very much in the *28 Days Later*/*Dawn Of The Dead* remake mould rather than the stumbling, Romero-inspired originals. If these scenes are created using the actual in-game engine then fans of the series are in for a treat. Given Capcom's recent form there's no reason to doubt that the game will look like this – just look at *killer7* and, of course, *Resident Evil 4*: both push their host systems to the maximum of their capability and both games still look beautiful. There's little doubt that Capcom knows great graphics.

There's an incredible amount of zombie-based games on the horizon – *City Of The Dead*, *Condemned*, *Possession*, *Stubbs* and *Dead Rising* will all be competing with *Resident Evil 5* for our attention over the coming year. However, all being well, Mikami's masterwork will stand tall in the sea of the dead. *Resident Evil* is too precious and lucrative a franchise to be anything less than superb. Unless someone spikes Capcom's tea with T-virus, we can expect another great dose of survival horror come 2006.

> "ALL BEING WELL, MIKAMI'S MASTERWORK WILL STAND TALL IN THE SEA OF THE DEAD"



If these really are in-game shots then we may well forget about every other game ever.

Could it be Chris Redfield? Whoever it is he's got *gorgeous* hair.


eMag

FATAL FRAME ZERO



"THE MOST TERRIFYING JAPANESE HORROR INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE TO DATE"
TECMO PRESS RELEASE

■ Something very horrible is happening here. You'll find out more as you go on.

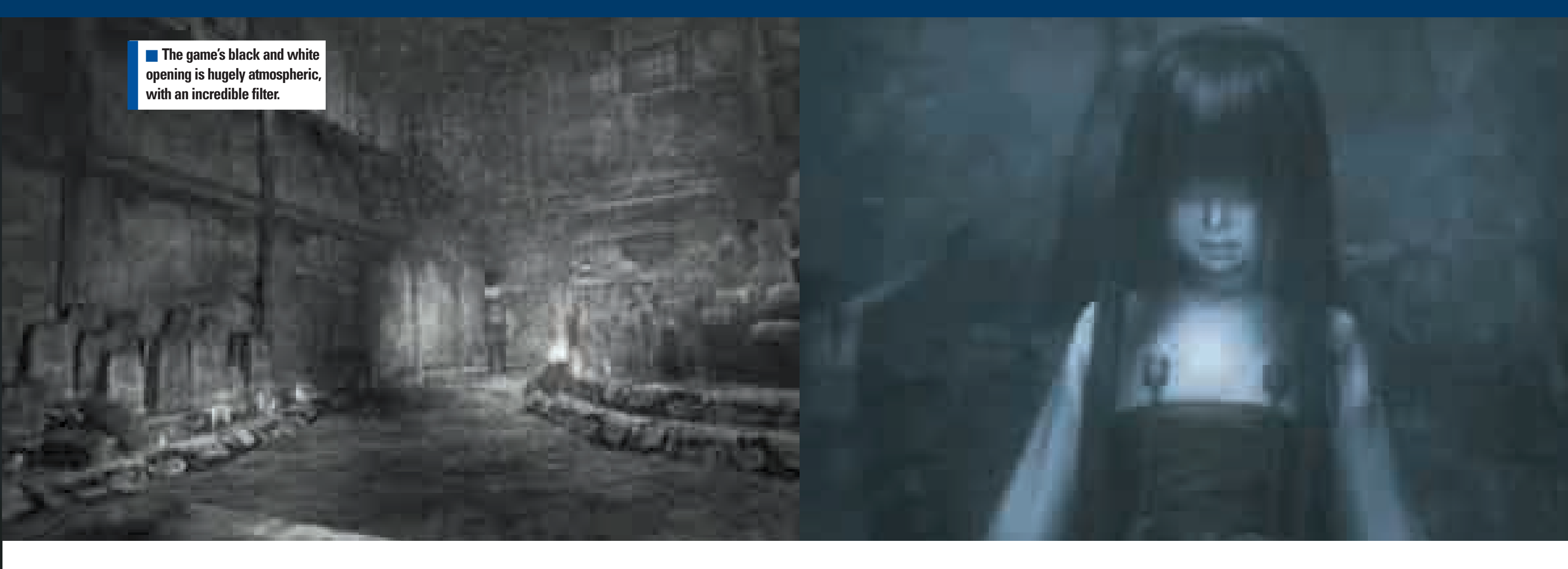


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Tecmo is responsible for some of the most graphically intense titles this generation. Aside from the previous two *Fatal Frames*, the firm has created the *Dead Or Alive* franchise, as well as the fantastic *Ninja Gaiden*. The name Tecmo has become synonymous with polished titles.

HISTORY

■ **NINJA GAIDEN** 2004 [Xbox]
■ **DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL** 2003 [Xbox]
■ **DEAD OR ALIVE** 1996 [Multi]



■ The game's black and white opening is hugely atmospheric, with an incredible filter.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Tecmo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Out Now, US: Q4 '05)
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ The most terrifying *Fatal Frame* yet, featuring multiple characters, a *Silent Hill*-style twin-world dynamic, and a story with deep roots in Shinto mythology.

A THIRD DOSE OF THE SPOOKIEST NAME IN HORROR GAMING

PS2 **Japanese horror videogames are beginning to fall into one of two camps.** *Resident Evil* has taken the traditional 'find key to open door' formula and turned it on its head, making the experience far more action-orientated yet retaining the genre's themes of dread and claustrophobia. *Fatal Frame Zero* remains firmly in the old-school camp, far more concerned with imagery and spirituality than altering its game mechanics.

Fatal Frame, as a series, has its roots firmly in traditional Japanese ghost stories. If *Silent Hill* is the videogame equivalent of a Lynchian nightmare, then *Fatal Frame* is Hideo (*Ring*, *Dark Water*) Nakata-style horror. The theme that runs through the series is common in Japanese folklore – vengeful spirits haunt an object or environment and wreak havoc upon whoever might interfere with it – and several elements of the gameplay will be familiar to series followers.

The 'camera obscura' returns in *Fatal Frame Zero*, once again used as the main line of defence against ghostly apparitions. But has anything changed since the previous instalment? Well, the game looks even better, truly pushing the PS2 to its limits. Environments, weather effects and particularly the ghosts are rendered with immaculate detail, and are vital to the game's verisimilitude – if you're not immersed in the game then all sense of fear is lost. The black and white filter that accompanies the game's opening section is superb; scratched and tarnished like old 16mm film stock, setting the tone perfectly.

The game's premise is based around 'The House of Sleep' – a physical manifestation of lead character Rei Kurosawa's nightmares. When Rei sleeps, she, and the player, enter this dreaded house and have to survive the horrific onslaught that lies therein. However, in a change for the series, the game also operates in the real world; a place of relative serenity that's a stark contrast to the terror of Rei's dreams. In a similar style to *Silent Hill 4*, the line between these two worlds begins to blur and Rei's nightmares creep into her everyday existence.

The story revolves around the hideous tattoo that Rei receives in a cut-scene (a dream), as soon afterwards she wakes up with the same markings on her body. Obviously, it's hard to tell how well this story is implemented into the game, but as an introduction it's fascinating. The cut-scenes that pepper early moments in the game are fantastically gruesome. They easily stand up to their movie equivalents but aren't as effective as the in-game scares, mostly due to a lack of player control.

Another first for the series is the use of multiple playable characters. Rei will be joined by her friend Kei, a young journalist, while the star of the first *Fatal Frame*, Miku, is also set to return to help Rei. How the many characters will affect gameplay is unknown, but it points to a retelling of the story from several angles – a cinematic technique that, when implemented skilfully, can prove extremely interesting.

Fatal Frame Zero will offer fans more of the same – unadulterated terror drenched in atmosphere and Japanese tradition. However, by sticking with the now very clunky survival horror template it will be interesting to see how it fares in a post-*Resi 4* gaming culture. Those who can look past the limited gameplay will be in for a macabre treat.

"FATAL FRAME ZERO OFFERS MORE UNADULTERATED TERROR DRENCHED IN ATMOSPHERE"

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

Since the Hollywood remakes of *Ring* and *The Grudge* hit the mainstream, the image of Japanese ghosts has become a common object of terror. The most usual is the young girl sporting long, dishevelled hair that obscures her face. These ghosts are known as Yuurei and are characterised by how they died – normally in a moment of intense negative emotion such anger or sorrow. *Fatal Frame* bases much of its story around these ghosts, with each plotline revealing how each ghost had been wronged during their lifetime. Yuurei are now so ingrained into our culture that *Fatal Frame* can operate here on the same level it does in the East.

MARVEL NEMESIS: RISE OF THE IMPERFECTS



We're sure Spider-Man's costume was never quite *that* tight.

ABOUT AS FAR FROM SUPER AS YOU CAN GET

Oh, *Power Stone*, how we miss you. Quite why you were never updated is a mystery to us. Quite why the online gaming community is still bereft of your presence defies logic. And quite why no arena-based arcade fighter has come close to your greatness leaves us more charmingly befuddled than Hugh Grant in just about every film he's ever been in. What's worse, perhaps, is that each pretender just twists the knife further – *Kung Fu Chaos*, *Stake*, *Rave Master* and many others have tried to do what Capcom did so well, but with limited success. And now it's EA's turn to give it a whirl.

Theoretically, *Marvel Nemesis* should be fantastic. Marvel's cast of heroes is perfectly suited to this kind of game and just the ability to have Spider-Man face off against Venom will be enough for many a comic fan to part with some cash. But at this stage there doesn't look to be much, if any, appeal beyond this.

While playing *Nemesis,* a single word bounced around our heads until controller and hands parted: broken. Character balancing looks to be an alien concept, knocking down an opponent allows you to chuck most of the items in an arena at them for free damage before they can get up, and skill-based gameplay and precision don't look to have been implemented yet.

While our focus was the sketchy multiplayer, the solo campaign does seem more coherent. Attacks can punish multiple opponents and the story aspect helps give credibility to the less likely match-ups. You'll be able to pick your heroes as the mode goes on, either sticking with the initial batch of do-gooders or bringing in the extra talent you'll meet along the way.

With quality brawlers like *Def Jam* in the EA archives it would be a real shame for *Marvel Nemesis* to be released in its current state. Although some of the issues we mentioned could possibly be alleviated with a better understanding of the game, it's the fundamental problems that bother us most because, this close to release, these are unlikely to change dramatically.

With all kinds of comic-based unlockables (characters, artwork and voiced comics, among many other trinkets) for the player who perseveres though, there's little doubt that Marvel fans will get their kicks here – even if the game itself does seem to be about as impressive as Batfink.

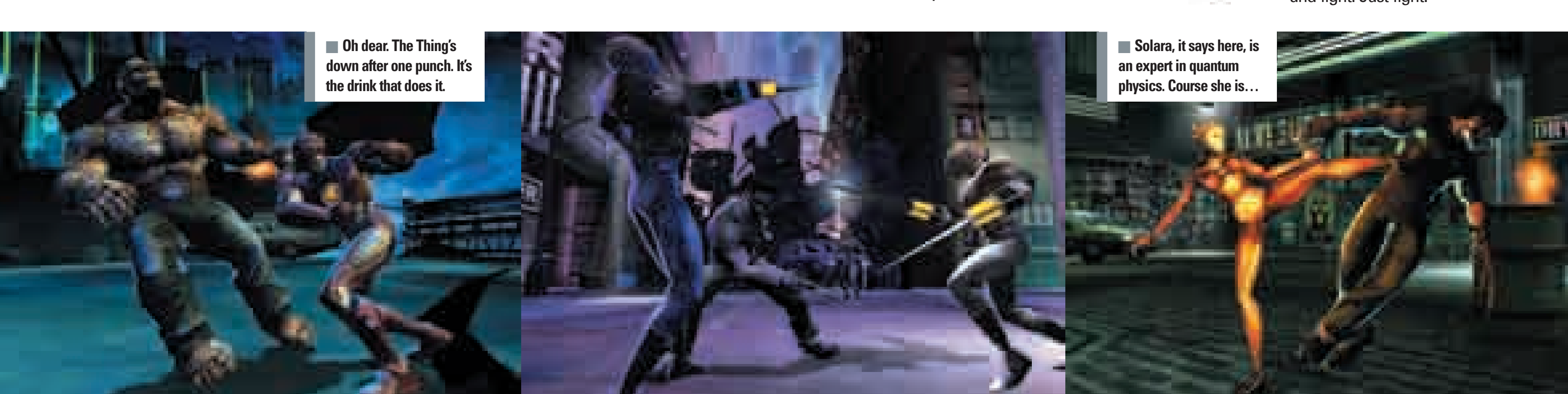
"IT'S LIKE DEVELOPERS HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT MADE POWER STONE SO GREAT"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, Cube, PSP, DS
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Pick your favourite Marvel character or one of EA's heroes and fight. Just fight.



Oh dear. The Thing's down after one punch. It's the drink that does it.

Solara, it says here, is an expert in quantum physics. Course she is…


eMag

BEAT DOWN: FISTS OF VENGEANCE



Not only are these fights a bit rubbish, they're brutally unfair. Sort it out, Capcom.

SURE-FOOTED CAPCOM COULD BE ABOUT TO STUMBLE

It's a well-known fact that all good things must come to an end. We'd like to think that this isn't really the case, but it generally is. Take Capcom, for example: running along with a big smile on its face, cradling a huge pile of games in its arms, each title a little bit greater than the last. Hang on, what's this? Capcom seems to be heading towards a large, easy-to-trip-over lump that looks much like a copy of *Beat Down: Fists Of Vengeance*. Damn.

This is exactly what we see when we look at this game and you can't help but cringe when you think about it. After having a fair crack at the preview version of *Beat Down*, we're currently unimpressed by the game on every single level. Bolted together as some form of cross-genre, beat-'em-up RPG the game is a simple one: using a fairly basic range of moves, you have to move your chosen character through the streets of the city of Las Sambras, recruit thugs you meet into your party and take – not to mention beat – down anyone that stands in your way or refuses to join you. You'd think it would be tough to make this set-up unappealing – especially with Capcom's knowledge of beat-'em-ups – but it seems to have been managed.

The key irritant is the combat system. A single button for punch, one for kick and a third to grab/throw is hardly going to cause hoots of excitement at the best of times, and when you find yourself switching from multi-foe street brawls into a one-on-one match it just smacks of insufficiency. For a company that possesses the know-how to create intricate combat and combo systems for difficult games such as *Viewtiful Joe* and the *Devil May Cry* series, what's on offer at this stage is woeful and we've come to expect far better.

It may sound harsh, but we actually fail to see where the development time has been spent on this title. Although it's not really offensive per se, it's certainly not looking to be a visual feast, and the 'meh' plot along with the mildly repetitive gameplay really doesn't seem likely to sell *Beat Down* to the masses. In fact, this is looking noticeably worse than similar titles that we found ourselves playing a few years ago.

> "WE ACTUALLY FAIL TO SEE WHERE THE DEVELOPMENT TIME HAS BEEN SPENT ON THIS TITLE"

This is all quite a shame, as there are actually some reasonable ideas scattered throughout the title, such as the contacts list that you acquire. Any thug you bump into on the street and manage to lure into your gang will add his phone number to this list and you can 'summon' him by phone whenever there's a hole in your party or you require his services.

Monitoring stats and bringing in the heavies most suited to a situation could well demand a certain degree of thought and possibly add an interesting tactical element that goes far beyond the button-mashing that seems to be on offer at present (if it's done properly, that is). But, unfortunately, it seems as if Capcom may have missed this trick as well.

Of course, the good thing about playing these games at this stage is that there's still a chance that we'll be pleasantly surprised by the finished code when it arrives for review. Sure, there are an awful lot of faults with *Beat Down* at the moment, but if we had to put money on one company that could turn it around it would be Capcom. We hope we're right.

WHAT NOT TO WEAR

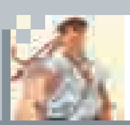
As you go around beating down various gang members and police types, your reputation tends to get a little battered. As the plod seem to only remember what it is that you were wearing at the time of the attack, it's necessary to change your clothes at regular intervals to avoid detection. What you wear will also affect how intimidating you seem to your opponents… well, to a point at least. It seems to be possible to dress male characters up in crop tops and mini-skirts without damaging your reputation too much. This is quite stupid and we can only hope that it's a feature that doesn't make it into the finished version.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Take to the crime-ridden streets and brawl your way around until you and your gang control the city.



FIGHT PROFILE

Fighting is one of those activities that's promoted as a very manly thing to do. Of course, deep down, we all know that it's ultimately quite stupid and it hurts. For this reason, it's nice to be able to indulge in a spot of sparring within the safety of a videogame, and developers have never been shy about forcing it into their titles.

HISTORY

- ONIMUSHA 3 2004 [PS2]
- VIEWTIFUL JOE 2003 [Multi]
- STREET FIGHTER III 2000 [DC]

Negotiating is an option in most cases but you'll usually end up having a scrap.

Call your mates to rescue you. One of the few good features at this stage.

"THIS INTENSE, URBAN ACTION GAME FEATURES A TWISTING STORYLINE FILLED WITH BETRAYAL, WARRING CARTELS AND HARD-HITTING BATTLES"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

A LITTLE PUNCH DRUNK

FIGHT CLUB + ADVENTURE x SILLY = BEAT DOWN

FRAME CITY KILLER



"FRAME CITY KILLER DELIVERS UNBELIEVABLY DETAILED VISUALS AND PALM-SWEATING CHALLENGES TO EVEN THE MOST HARDCORE GAMER"
NAMCO PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT

HITMAN + FUTURE - 47 = FRAME CITY KILLER

■ Surely you could have found more subtle glasses? Should have gone to Specsavers…

■ It's not looking spectacular at the moment, but there's a while until the release date.

FRAME CITY KILLER

XBOX 360

DEVELOPER PROFILE



Namco was founded in Tokyo in 1955 by the present chairman, Masaya Nakamura, when it installed two rocking-horse rides on the roof of a department store. Today the business has bases in Europe and the US and has been responsible for arcade classics like *Pac-Man* and *Galaxian* as well as modern gems like *Katamari Damacy*.

HISTORY

- **PAC-PIX** 2005 [DS]
- **KATAMARI DAMACY** 2004 [PS2]
- **DIG DUG** 1983 [Multi]



SHOULD BE AS PRETTY AS A PICTURE

For many, the *Hitman* series changed the way games were played. We've all seen open maps that can be explored at leisure and bonus missions that drift from the main path of your mission, but *Hitman* really succeeded in presenting a new way of playing – actual choice. Every step of the way you were presented with options. Well, not even presented really; you had to find these options for yourself and pursue whichever route you either preferred or thought would meet your needs the best.

It's a gameplay type that's now been mimicked many times – with titles such as *Thief* providing a very similar experience – but the current generation of consoles is extremely limiting when it comes to rewarding players with anything greater in the way of choice. So it's no surprise that when the powerful next gen arrives it's likely we'll see plenty more titles of this ilk forcing their way into our lives, and the first of these looks to be *Frame City Killer*.

The title looks to play in a very similar way to *Hitman*. You'll be given a target and it's up to you exactly how you bring him down. Your character – an undercover agent who's posing as an assassin and is hilariously named Crow – can collect profiles, pay informants and choose weapons and means from a list of possibilities that should easily top anything we've seen to date, and with each successful hit you'll get a little closer to uncovering the mystery behind the Visual Acid Drug that you have to destroy.

> "THE SIMILARITIES WITH THE HITMAN GAMES ARE LIKELY TO CAUSE THIS TITLE MOST GRIEF"

If you're looking for a key difference between this and similar titles then the most obvious one is the setting. As you'd imagine, the future holds many possibilities for an assassin and as well as the neon environments and the 'new breed' of enemy that you're bound to encounter, you'll be furnished with some rather nifty hi-tech gadgetry to make your killing sprees go a little more smoothly.

The best of these seems to be your glasses. These aren't going to be your usual vision-boosting specs, and even the x-ray and sonar abilities that we've seen in games lately have be bettered by this eyewear. Simply by looking at a person you'll be able to view data about them that will give you clues about what you're meant to be doing. Exactly how much this data reveals is unknown at the moment, and if it gives things away too freely it could damage the playability of the title, but it's a nice idea and if implemented properly it could well be the feature that pulls this game away from its competitors.

However, it's the similarities with the *Hitman* games that are likely to cause *Frame City Killer* the most grief. Number 47 has a pretty hefty fan base that will be waiting for his next-gen appearance and the masses are unlikely to take too kindly to this game attempting to steal the formula that made the series such a success. A few different gadgets and a futuristic setting aren't likely to establish the title as a game in its own right and with so many other titles launching around the same time that will come with the sole intention of showing exactly what the next-gen machines can do, *Frame City Killer* could well come up short.

Fortunately, it's still early days, so we'll have to wait and see exactly what else the game has in store for us before we judge it too harshly.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Take control of a futuristic assassin charged with the task of halting the production of a new drug. Easy, yes?

LINE 'EM UP

It's always nice to have a little extra challenge hidden within your games to really test you when you've managed to master everything else. *Frame City Killer*'s way of doing this is to implement a combo system that will reward you for chaining your kills together. Okay, it's an element that's been included in games since time began, but in a title of this type, where disposing of enemies can be approached in so many different ways, it could well be a very difficult thing to master. Also, with open attacks likely to greatly affect how you play out the remainder of the level, will it be worth attracting all that attention just to continue a combo? The choice will be yours.



Killing people can be done in two key ways: loudly or quietly. This is loudly.

GRAFFITI KINGDOM



■ A frog? In what looks like a nappy? Why the hell not? It's art…

LIKE PENNY CRAYON, ONLY NOT RUBBISH

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Hot-B
DEVELOPER: Taito
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ Draw your own freaky character and watch in awe as it comes to life and fights, levels up and does silly things just for you.

You really should get into import gaming. As well as being able to get most triple-A titles early and pick up games when you find yourself on foreign shores, you have the added benefit of access to games that no publisher would dare risk on the European market. Japanese shooters galore filter out on a monthly basis (much to the delight of our Retro editor), rhythm action fans get treated to more great musical silliness than they can possibly handle, and there's the odd quirky release that just makes you glad to have imported hardware.

One such game was *Magic Pengel*, a curious, *Pokémon*-esque affair that replaced the usual cast of pre-designed epitomes of cuteness with a truly unique option – creating your own battlers using a primitive paint tool and watching them fight in not-so-glorious 3D. Now, we've seen some unexpected sequels in our time (sit down, *Rogue Agent*, you're making the place look untidy) but *Magic Pengel* follow-up *Graffiti Kingdom* really takes the crudely drawn biscuit.

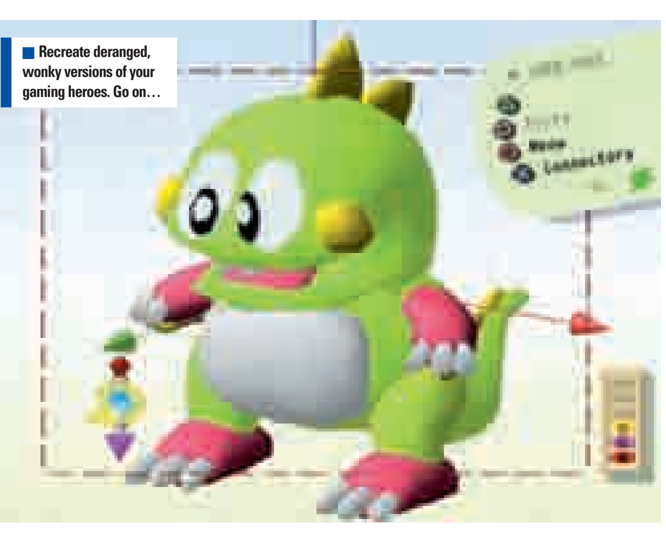
But while *Magic Pengel* was far better conceptually than it was when you came to actually play it, *Graffiti Kingdom* looks to be substantially improved in almost every way. Stepping into the shoes of Prince Pixel, the player gets to go wild with the paint tools; the results are then blown up into 3D and can be further modified afterwards. But while *Magic Pengel* just had the resulting blob pulsating and throwing out generic moves, you'll be able to animate your creation and assign it moves with which to fight the good fight.

Some of the more useful tools won't be available until later in the game, but if you track down the game's official website some of the characters that have been posted from the Japanese version are absolutely superb – Chun Li (complete with Spinning Bird Kick), Bub, Wolverine and an insane amount of Gundam wannabes have all been recreated, albeit relatively simply, in *Graffiti Kingdom*.

With the Prince able to switch between a selection of creations for any given battle there's the same sort of tactical element as in the *Pokémon* series – different moves are effective on each enemy so you'll need to be cycling through your move sets a lot in order to get anywhere. If you've always liked the idea of *Pokémon* but never liked the character design or stigma that seems to be attached to the brand, this could be worth keeping an eye on.

"LET YOUR ARTISTIC SKILLS RUN WILD OR MAKE AN ARMY OF CUBES – THE CHOICE IS YOURS"





■ Recreate deranged, wonky versions of your gaming heroes. Go on…


eMag

SIN EPISODES

VALVE AND RITUAL TEAM UP ON A PROJECT THEY CAN BE PROUD OF

When *SiN* was launched back in 1998 we were shown just how cruel the games industry can be. It looked as if developer Ritual Entertainment was onto a winner: a slicker than slick FPS based in the futuristic Freeport City, launched at a time when high-action first-person shooters were all the rage – how could it possibly go wrong?

Well, it's as if Ritual had uttered those very words itself and, Sod's Law being what it is, things went wrong. This inevitable wrongness came in the intimidating form of *Half-Life*, a very similar title that the masses took to in a far greater way than *SiN*. *Half-Life* went on to dominate the charts, suck up every award going and effectively sweep *SiN* under the rug. Ouch.

Fortunately for Ritual, *SiN* didn't glide silently under everyone's radar. Valve – the very company responsible for *Half-Life* – has now revealed itself as a huge fan of the game and has volunteered to distribute the sequel, *SiN Episodes*, via its download service, Steam. Due to the history between the two companies this pairing may seem unexpected, but the relationship isn't anywhere near as strained as you may think and the two have actually worked together before on *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*.

"There has never been any sort of resentment towards Valve," says level designer Richard Gray. "On the contrary, we have always been big fans of theirs – after all, this is most definitely not a one-game market. In my opinion *SiN* was 'overlooked' because it was released with five major, show-stopping bugs."

Of course, distribution via Steam isn't the only benefit of working so closely with Valve; this partnership has also presented Ritual with the opportunity to use Valve's Source engine. With all this in mind, we think it's fairly safe to prepare ourselves for a rather different version of Freeport…

"We've completely re-imagined Freeport City for *SiN Episodes*," begins Ritual's community relations manager, Steve Hessel. "In the first *SiN*, even though it was set in the late 2030s, Freeport very much looked like a present-

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Most games have a small cross-genre element about them; whether it's a short puzzle section or a spot of lock picking, you can usually expect a little variation. *SiN Episodes* could well be about to take this to new levels, though, as the developer will have plenty of time to 'mix it up' while it works on future episodes. "That's the great thing about episodic content," designer and writer Shawn Ketcherside tells us. "We're free to try out any number of different gameplay experiences. Don't get me wrong, this is still a shooter, and a great one, but we always want to push the edge a little, give the player something new. Each episode is going to offer something fresh, or a twist on an old standby to give players some new experiences in the genre. I don't want to give anything away regarding our future plans, but we have some really great ideas in the planning stages."

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Valve
DEVELOPER: Ritual Entertainment
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Continue the fight against Elexis and the mutant menace – only this time you and the team are a little older and wiser.

HISTORY

After the unfortunate performance of *SiN*, Ritual decided that *Episodes* should take gaming to the next level. It's already been in development for longer than *Half-Life 2*…



SIN EPISODES
PC

"SIN EPISODES COULD COMPLETELY CHANGE THE WAY PC GAMES ARE PRESENTED FROM NOW ON"



■ The carnage possible in *SiN Episodes* is pretty nasty, all thanks to the Source engine.

JOHN R. BLADE

■ Blade is a very different character than he was in the first title; he's now 'gone off on one' and is totally obsessed with catching the mutant menace Elexis and the SiNTEK corporation. In fact, rather than being constrained by his job as he was in the original, this game will start with him heading out alone, against orders, in an effort to find Elexis. This is a good example of how the game has grown up and is a fair sign that we're looking at a darker title.

EVERYBODY'S CHANGING

It's been seven long years since the original *SiN* was locking horns with *Half-Life*, and it looks like the lead characters have seen a fair bit of action during this time. Your original sidekick JC has matured a little and is slightly less annoying (if that's possible), and there's a pretty new face in the shape of young Jessica Cannon…

day city. In *SiN Episodes* its look is a lot more futuristic and the technology and architecture clearly support that."

This is hardly surprising. The game has been in development so long that an overhaul of the environment is to be expected, but convincingly building upon the first title is going to take a lot more than that. It's the story and the evolution of the characters that people are going to be watching most closely – to start with at least. Lead guy Blade returns, as does his sidekick JC and enemy Elexis.

"Of course the characters have also changed since *SiN* and *Wages Of SiN* [the game's add-on]," Hessel explains. "Blade is a lot more grizzled, more battle-hardened. His lack of success in exposing and taking down SinTEK has led to him being almost obsessed with bringing Elexis Sinclaire to justice. He is backed up by a more mature JC and HardCorps hotshot Jessica Cannon, who helps Blade out in the field. Then there's Elexis, of course. The resequencing process that put her DNA back together made her a bit younger, but mentally she's still her brilliant and scheming old self. She's got her own plans for Blade, so that is certainly going to be one of the major plot points throughout our story arc."

Being able to use Valve's Source engine will go a long way to convincing gamers that *SiN Episodes* is a new beast rather than a simple update, and it certainly opens up many new possibilities for Ritual, which would have been working with far more restrictions when dealing with the first title and its expansion pack.

"The Source engine has one of the best physics systems available today," says lead programmer Ken Harward. "So yes, we want to take advantage of it in every way we can. We're incorporating physics gameplay into our puzzles, action sequences and AI behaviours. For example, when Jessica drives a vehicle with these new physics she won't be a perfect driver and may spin out and slide. Also, enemies will be looking to take

JESSICA CANNON

■ Tough-as-nails Jessica will act as your main sidekick throughout the majority of the game and she's not scared to get into a scuffle. Trained at HardCorps, Jessica will be on the battlefield with you, taking out enemies from strategic positions and pointing out areas of interest. As well as this, she'll take charge of any vehicle that you wish to commandeer, leaving you free to take potshots at passing enemies.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Established in August 1996 and located in the historic West End of Dallas, Ritual Entertainment is a veteran game development studio that's also developed its own game-making technology. Now with over 40 employees (who refer to themselves as 'The Tribe') the studio is attempting to change the way we play games.

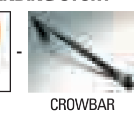
HISTORY

- ■ **COUNTER-STRIKE** 2003 [Xbox]
- ■ **HEAVY METAL** 2000 [PC]
- ■ **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT** 2000 [PC]



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE NEVER ENDING STORY

 -  +  = 

HALF-LIFE 2 - CROWBAR + EPISODES = SIN EPISODES

"EACH EPISODE IS DESIGNED TO BE A COMPLETE STORY BY ITSELF, BUT EACH EPISODE WILL TIE INTO A MUCH LARGER STORY ARC"

SHAWN KETCHERSIDE, LEAD DESIGNER/WRITER, RITUAL

■ One of the most memorable moments of 'Emergence' (the first chapter of *SiN Episodes*) is this car chase down the Freeport highway – it's an impressive sequence and no mistake.

Jessica's more than just a pretty face – she helps you out along the way as well.

advantage of the items nearby – whether dropping them on top of you or throwing them in your way. We're taking a rock-solid physics system and trying to apply it wherever it fits."

However, all of these improvements are forced to take a back seat when you consider the key feature of *SiN Episodes*: this is to be the title that will introduce us to the concept of episodic gaming. This will involve separate chapters of the game becoming available for download over time. It's an idea that's been on the cards for a long while now, but until now nobody's been brave enough to make the notion a reality. Although the meeting of these two FPS developers seems like the obvious chance to give it a go, it still must be fairly frightening to be the metaphorical guinea pig for the entire industry…

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT

One bonus of playing an episodic game is that you never know where the story is going to take you. As the plot is in a constant state of generation it's possible for the episodes to follow the path that the players want them to. "We have a pretty detailed plan outlining the story for the first batch of episodes, including various story forks and twists," explains development director Tom Mustaine. "But the gamer feedback will be utilised to adjust which direction the forks will lead, along with potentially major and minor changes to future episodes. We used a similar approach with the Legionpharma.com and Sinclairetechnologies.com viral ARGs [alternative reality games], a majority of the content was laid out in a detailed plan far ahead of the site launch, but the ARG players and fan feedback directed the story along with the outcome of various riddles and puzzles." With this kind of technology at the gamers' and developers' disposal, who knows where the future lies?

"RITUAL IS BASICALLY CAPABLE OF PROVIDING AN UNLIMITED AMOUNT OF INSTALMENTS, REMOVING THE NEED FOR SEQUELS AND KEEPING THE GAMING PUBLIC HOOKED WITH A CONTINUOUS STORYLINE"

"It's more exhilarating than frightening, really," Ritual CEO Steve Nix tells us. "We believe in what we're doing and the game we are creating and that makes being the pioneer a lot easier. The games industry has been really slow to adopt new models but episodic [gaming] makes too much sense to keep on ignoring it. In the film industry, you have back catalogue on DVD, rental, cable and pay-per-view. In TV you have this explosion in the DVD boxset market. In music you have online stores like iTunes and the booming ringtone market. Episodic content is a great opportunity for developers who want to expand their options."

It's not only the developers that stand to benefit from Ritual and Valve's boldness – this could well mean big changes for us as gamers, changes that go far beyond minor innovations and mild graphical improvements. "We can keep making new episodes as long as we are having fun making them and people are enjoying playing them," Nix assures us. "Since each story is fairly self-contained we can just keep on going with them, continuing to expand the universe, characters and gameplay mechanics."

The phrase 'just keep going' is an interesting one. Ritual is basically capable of providing an unlimited amount of instalments, removing the need for sequels and keeping the gaming public hooked with a continuous storyline. The number of options that this opens up to Ritual is astonishing and each episode that arrives (each estimated to contain around six hours playtime) could come as a continuation of the main story or as part of a side-story with which it crosses paths. To be honest, if it works, there's little not to like about it. The only question really is: how frequently will we see the chapters arrive?

"We have an iterative, playtesting-driven development process, so there is no set schedule for releases," says Nix. "In an ideal world we would have a new episode out every three to four months, but making each episode fun has to take precedence over schedule. We will eventually release episode collections in a retail box to reach a customer base that may not have been exposed to the online versions."

SiN Episodes could completely change the way in which PC games are presented from now on, and with the next-gen consoles armed with similar online abilities to the PC it could well change gaming forever. We're certainly interested to see how it turns out.

PUBLISHER PROFILE

The entertainment software and technology company Valve was founded in 1996 and is based in Bellevue, Washington. The company's debut title, *Half-Life*, managed to bag itself over 50 awards when it was launched in 1999 – and it deserved every single one of them. *Half-Life 2* is on its way to matching that gong tally.

HISTORY

- HALF-LIFE 2 2004 [PC]
- DAY OF DEFEAT 2003 [PC]
- HALF-LIFE 1999 [PC]

"Ooh… guns, guns, guns!" Don't worry about running short of ammo any time soon.

"SIN HAS ALWAYS BEEN CHARACTER DRIVEN, THEREFORE IT IS RITUAL'S GOAL TO CONTINUE TO INTRODUCE INTERESTING AND EVEN SOMETIMES ANNOYING PERSONALITIES INTO THE UNIVERSE"

ROBERT ATKINS, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, RITUAL

Remember, this is just the first episode – there are plenty more environments to come.

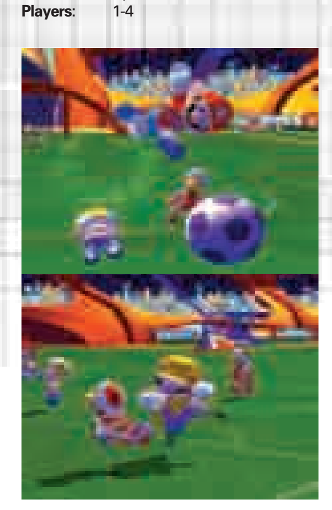
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

SUPER MARIO STRIKERS

IT'S-A ME, RONALDINHO

Format: GameCube
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Next Level Games
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



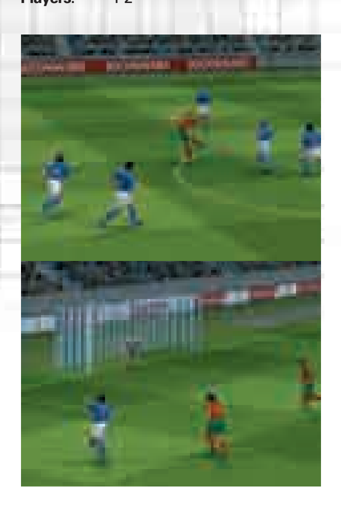
Arcade-style football? Small teams? Power moves and over-the-top celebrations? Isn't this just *Sega Soccer Slam* with Mario? Well, yes, but that's not surprising considering many of the staff at Next Level Games come from the now-defunct Black Box Games, the developer behind Sega's frantic footie game. Thankfully, adding Mario to the mix of basic football (five-a-side, one ball, two goals and, er, that's it) and topping it off with exaggerated abilities and power-ups works quite well, given the plumber's previous forays into the world of golf and tennis. Considering how much we liked *Sega Soccer Slam* we've got high hopes for this, so long as it doesn't degenerate into a pointless power-play mess like *Mario Power Tennis*.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '06 (JAPAN/US: Q4 '05)

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5

BACK OF THE PORTABLE NET

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2



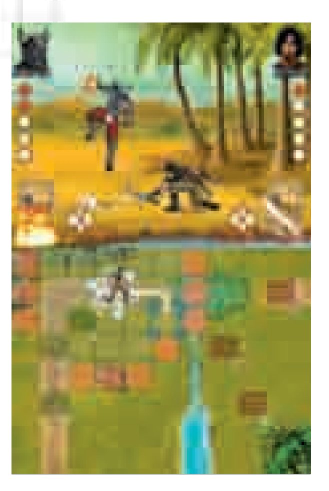
The most anticipated PSP game so far? That's the suggestion, although we already know that moving *Pro Evolution Soccer* to the PSP isn't nearly as much of a technical achievement as it sounds. Still, the handheld version of *Pro Evo 5* does at least offer some benefits – 57 national sides and 136 club teams, six leagues and a host of tournaments, wireless play and even the option to transfer data from the PS2 version. Our only concern is how the precise PS2 controls will translate to the slightly lacklustre PSP ones; comments have already been made on how certain moves are having to be reassigned or removed altogether, so it's just a matter of whether that'll upset dedicated players as much as it should.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '05

BATTLES OF PRINCE OF PERSIA

FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: In-House
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1-2



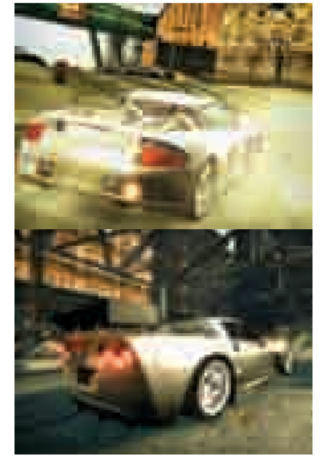
We can't be the first to suggest that Ubisoft's latest take on the *Prince Of Persia* licence should be subtitled *Sands Of Time Ac!d*. The decision to create a card-based strategy game that appears to meld the concepts behind *Metal Gear Ac!d* and *Fire Emblem* may have been a good one, especially since it's a genre to which the DS is perfectly suited. With the game set between *Sands Of Time* and *Warrior Within* (clearing up the mystery of the Dahaka along the way), players experience the action not just from the Prince's point of view but also those of generals who hold key roles in the battle for survival. With card trading and multiplayer bolstering the single-player campaign, it'll be intriguing to see how this pans out.

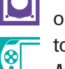
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '05

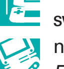
NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

FESTIVE CHART-TOPPER, THEN?

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC, PC PSP, DS, GBA, 360
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA Canada
Genre: Racing
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)

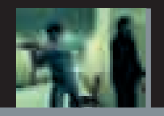






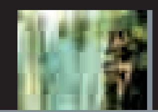
Of the two screenshots above, only one is from the Xbox 360 – can you tell which? It's not as clear cut as you'd expect, though whether that says good things for the other consoles or bad for Microsoft's new toy remains to be seen. With *Most Wanted* it would appear that EA has merely switched street cred for notoriety in its latest *Need For Speed* game; instead of building respect, it's all about earning a bad reputation by (surprise) winning races and avoiding the cops. Car modding is still a key part too, so expect to be moulding bumpers long into the night… or at least until *Burnout Revenge* comes out.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '05



DELAYED – Hitman: Blood Money (Multi)

■ And we were so looking forward to playing through Agent 47's latest adventure too. Unfortunately, the decision has been made to push *Blood Money* back into early 2006.



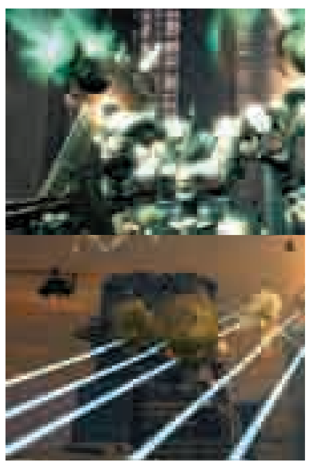
DELAYED – Tomb Raider: Legend (Multi)

■ Another victim of the SCi/Eidos ordeal, with Crystal Dynamics being told that it has more time to 'maximise the hit potential' of Lara's rebirth. Expect the game to arrive in early 2006.

PROJECT FORCE

BIG SHINY ROBOTS FROM HELL

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: Japan
Publisher: From Software
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1 (Online TBA)



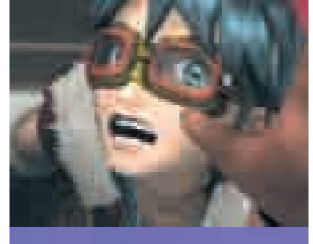
At last, some tangible evidence of the PlayStation3's capabilities, albeit evidence featuring From Software's iconic trademarks – giant robots. Knowing full well that its *Armored Core* franchise is a precious commodity, From has sensibly chosen a new project for its PS3 launch title, and while the game will obviously be familiar to those who like a bit of mech-on-mech action, it should be a far cry from the *Armored Core* we know and love/hate (delete as appropriate). What's interesting is how From's initial snapshots of *Project Force* shun Sony's preference for tech demos in favour of something more believable; it might not look as impressive by comparison, but it still seems shiny enough for us.

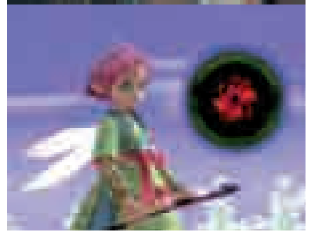
RELEASE DATE: Q2 '06

GRANDIA III

THE MORE, THE GRANDIA

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Game Arts
Genre: RPG
Players: 1





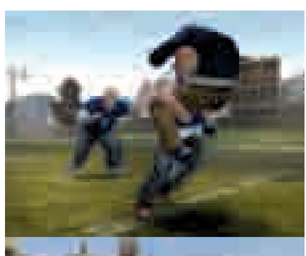
It might not have set the RPG world alight, but the *Grandia* series deserves the respect it has earned throughout the years. Why it's taken so long for a third iteration to make an appearance, we're not quite sure; regardless Square Enix is providing fans with more of what they want. Reuniting scriptwriter Takahiro Hasebe and character designer You Yoshinari (both responsible for the original *Grandia*) the game promises an involving story and an evolution of *Grandia II*'s semi-real-time combat system, with improvements made to incorporate aerial combat and communication between team-mates. But with so many decent RPGs around at the moment, you have to hope that *Grandia III* does something special to beat them all.

RELEASE DATE: TBA (JAPAN: OUT NOW)

BULLY

SCHOOL'S IN FOR SUMMER

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Rockstar Games
Developer: Rockstar North
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1





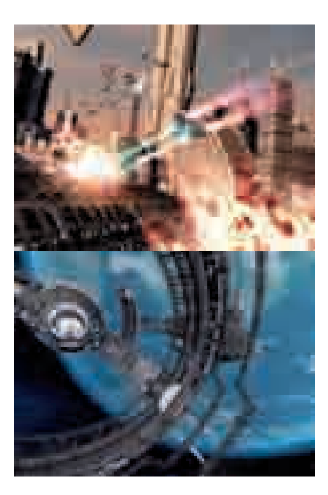
For a game that's supposedly out in less than two months (according to Rockstar's website, anyway), it's surprising how little is known about *Bully*. True, it's a Rockstar game and is naturally shrouded in secrecy, but you'd have thought someone might have spilled the beans by now. What is known is that the game isn't just *GTA: Grange Hill* – instead, your mission to rise to the top of the class involves helping teachers and attending lessons (played out through mini-game style activities) as much as it does flushing people's heads down the toilet. The free-form nature of the game obviously means you can handle things as you like, though, so don't be afraid to cut class… so long as you like the cane, of course.

RELEASE DATE: OCT '05

X3: REUNION

WELCOME TO SPACE REUNITED

Format: PC
Origin: Germany
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Egosoft
Genre: Simulation
Players: 1



For many people (including us), *Elite* is still king of its genre. Many have tried to conquer the space trading/combat/ simulation market, yet none have beaten *Elite*. That said, Egosoft appears to be coming close with *X3: Reunion*, a continuation of the successful *X* series. Unsurprisingly for a German game it's all about the stats, technical ability and detail; there's a new economy system allowing you to 'conquer your foes via commerce', a redesigned universe featuring new space phenomena, and the ability to fly closer to planets than ever before, as well as the chance to experience everything from dogfights to massive fleet battles. The question remains, though: can it best our favourite 21-year-old BBC Micro game?

RELEASE DATE : Q4 '05



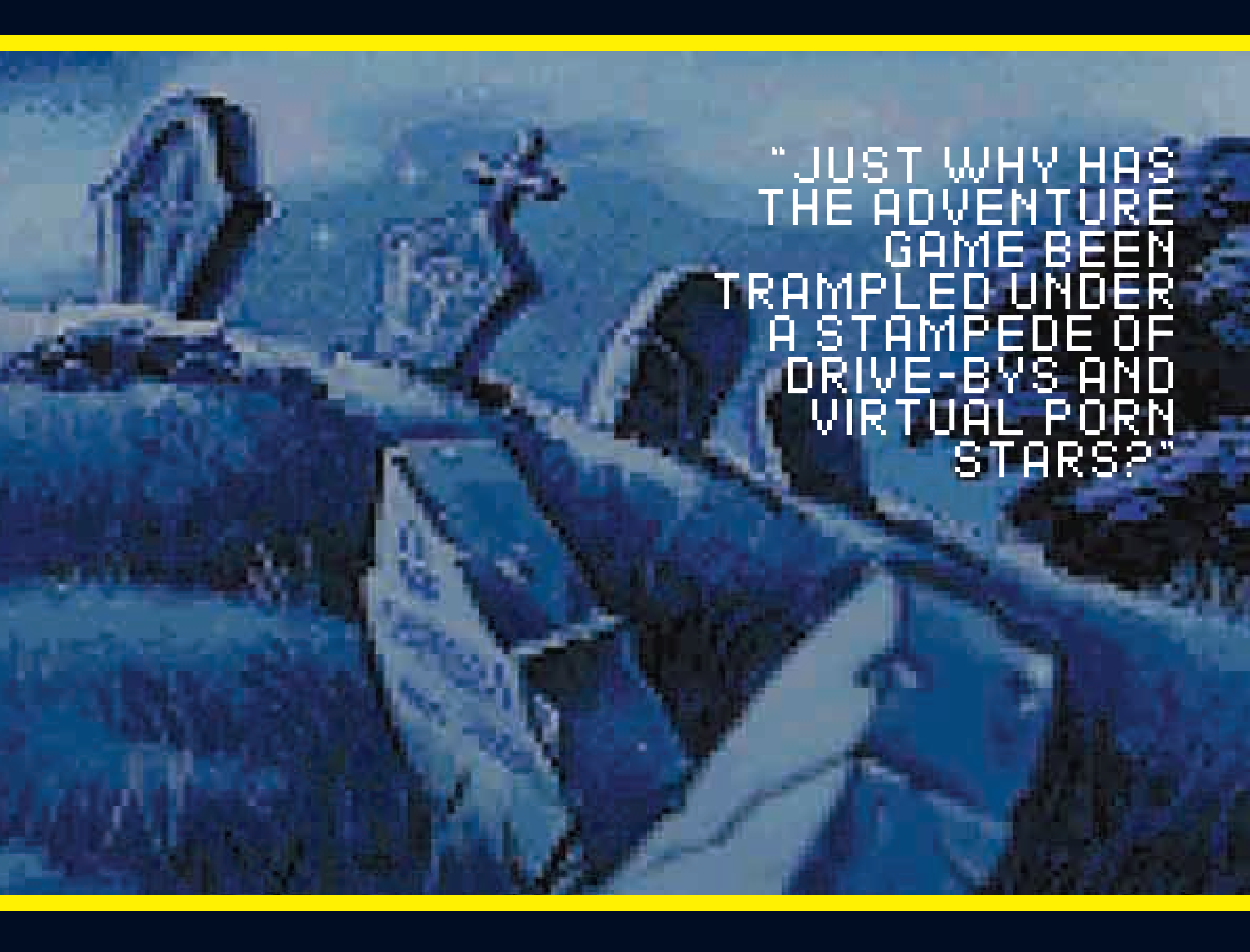
So many idols, so little time… **Shinobi – Arcade [Sega] 1987**


17950
2:31



A TALE'S END

>_ Is the art of point and click dead, or simply in need of some tender loving care from developers, publishers and gamers alike? games™ talks to the genre's heroes to find out more…



> "JUST WHY HAS THE ADVENTURE GAME BEEN TRAMPLED UNDER A STAMPEDE OF DRIVE-BYS AND VIRTUAL PORN STARS?"

There was a time when the adventure game was king. Characters felt real, stories had purpose, and gamers would often encounter dialogue deeper than 'Father, I will avenge your death', 'Things sure were easier before these damn zombies took over', and 'AIIIIIIIIE! MECHA-9C KILLTRON, GO!'. Today, however, this stuff is much harder to find. The genre has dissolved into a series of brilliant moments, forgettable shoe-ins and anarchic disasters.

The soon-to-be-released *Fahrenheit* with its twisting, branching storyline has been touted as the natural continuation of the genre, but the game's creator thinks otherwise. "The adventure genre is dead," says David Cage, CEO of *Fahrenheit* developer Quantic Dream. "It died because it failed to evolve. The old tradition of 2D puzzles, huge inventories where you need to combine objects to get new objects, endless dialogues and actions that you can only trigger if you stand on the right pixel… all this belongs to the past. I was a big fan of adventure games in the old days, but adventures have failed to move to real-time 3D and to consoles."

But it might not be all that bad. Tim Schafer is well known (and loved) in adventure game circles as the man behind LucasArts' *Day Of The Tentacle*, *Grim Fandango* and a purported third of *Monkey Island 1* and *2*, and he thinks the adventure game is still alive, just ignored. "We sold more copies of *Grim Fandango* than we did *Monkey Island*, but people see *Grim* as having low sales. It's just compared to what the industry standard was at the time. I think the same people that liked it before still like it."

This neglect seems criminal, as adventure games are in a unique position, as Cage points out. "Games in general only evoke basic emotions: fear, stress, anger, frustration, excitement and so on. Why should we limit ourselves to these primitive feelings? I think that games should be able to talk about adult topics, and not only about zombies and trolls." Well, we don't know anyone who's ever shed a tear during *Serious Sam*. And the graphic adventure, historically, is usually the only genre to step out of the boobs 'n' bullets realm. But given this, why don't people buy them? Why has the adventure game been trampled under a stampede of drive-bys, virtual porn stars and kindergarten-level demons?

>_DEFINE GENRE

Part of the problem might be because the genre has become hard to define, shedding die-hard fans along the way but failing to pick up new ones. Purists believe that linear point and click is all you need; others expect a more >_



"TEXT ADVENTURES GAVE

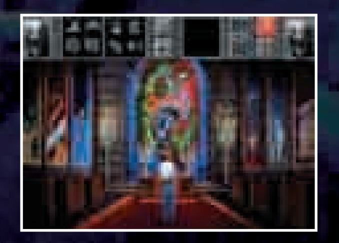
>_ open-ended journey. Where do you draw the line? Both arguments are valid but even the most vehement adventure fan will admit that the genre has rarely conformed to a strict set of guidelines. Compare, for example, 1979's *Zork* to 2002's *Syberia* and you'll begin to see why it's confusing. The former relied on a text-based interface – the player would tap in a multitude of verbs to interact with the environment; the latter was cinematic, visually breathtaking and mouse-driven. It was also more linear than a switchblade.

This has become a pattern. Over the years, adventure designers have eliminated the genre's scraggly bits, leaving their games as tight as Joan Rivers' face. The result? More coherent narratives, but zero player agency. Schafer isn't afraid to take the blame on behalf of LucasArts. "We wanted to make the interfaces more streamlined – we'd ask ourselves whether so many verbs were really necessary," he says. "When you come down to it, you have to open and close the door, and basically you're just using the door – you don't need to open an open door. So we just started to resolve these redundancies. We realised that, basically, you're using everything."

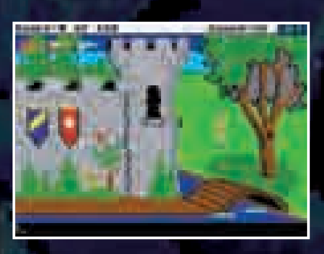
Some of these changes to the way games panned out were also made as a result of player pressure. Charles Cecil, MD of Revolution Software (the company behind *Lure Of The Temptress*, *Beneath A Steel Sky*, *In Cold Blood* and the *Broken Sword* series), says the evolution of the adventure genre was due to developers reacting to what players wanted. "It's all very well to type in 'drink'," he argues, "but the parsers weren't sophisticated enough to deliver what the player wanted to do. So players demanded an interface whereby the challenge was working out what you have to do, rather

CLASSICS

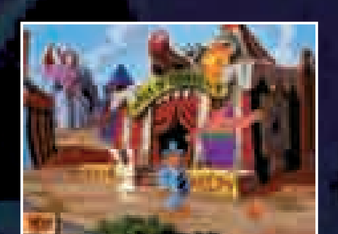
Gabriel Knight
A failing author and the woman who runs his rare book store go on disturbing journeys through New Orleans. One of the very few 'literary' game series around.
UPDATE POTENTIAL: None
Series author Jane Jensen has confirmed that there will be no sequels.



King's Quest
Arguably the most well-known adventure series ever, Roberta Williams' *King's Quest* is renowned for its upbeat humour and colourful environments.
UPDATE POTENTIAL: None
Roberta's husband has said she is "out of the industry and off to other horizons."



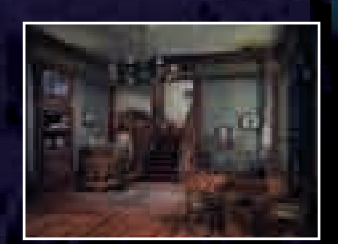
Sam & Max Hit The Road
One of the most-loved adventure games ever made. Quirky characters and sharp wit keep it on the 'must play' list today.
UPDATE POTENTIAL: Cancelled
"It was not an appropriate time to launch a graphic adventure on the PC" – LucasArts



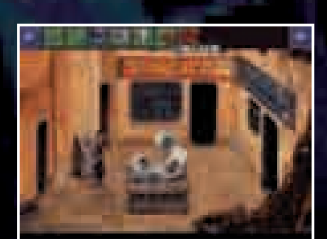
Grim Fandango
Poignant, satisfying and very funny, Tim Schafer's epic has likable characters and a quirky Mexican folklore/Art Deco setting.
UPDATE POTENTIAL: None
Schafer's moved on to DoubleFine, and it doesn't look like LucasArts will be publishing any adventure games.



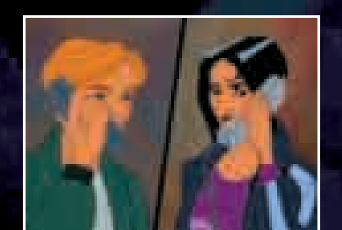
Syberia
Old-school adventuring it may be, but the series' magical world and complex characters make it a world-class title.
UPDATE POTENTIAL: None
The Adventure Company's PR co-ordinator, Duane Brown, says that there are no plans for a third *Syberia* game.



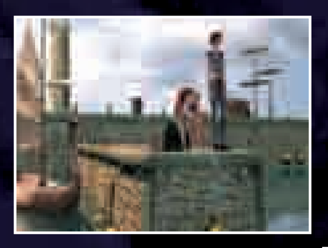
Beneath A Steel Sky
A sci-fi epic about a world controlled by greedy corporations. Luckily, it was also blessed with a great sense of humour.
UPDATE POTENTIAL: Yes
Details are scarce, but *BASS 2* is definitely in development. Keep watching www.revolution.co.uk.



Broken Sword
This country-hopping series is a favourite with adventure fans. With engaging plots covering the Knights Templar, Mayans and the Bible, who can blame them?
UPDATE POTENTIAL: Yes
Developer Revolution has already said that Broken Sword 4 is in the works.



The Longest Journey
This dreamy tale of a world of magic and a world of science falling into each other also boasts stunning environments.
UPDATE POTENTIAL: Yes
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey will be released sometime early in 2006.



THE PLAYER A REAL SENSE OF FREEDOM"

than working out how to do it. In *Broken Sword* we used up to 30 different verbs, and we'd present the player with about four for each object. Clearly, if you have a book, you're not going to eat it. Giving the player irrelevant verbs doesn't add anything whatsoever."

Schafer admits something is lost in simplification, and perhaps that's where some of the charm is lost. "In *Savage Island,* the old Scott Adams game, you could type the word 'hyperventilate' as a character action. You can't do that kind of stuff any more."

In some ways, text adventures gave the player a sense of freedom because they could try to solve a problem in as many ways as they liked, rather than having their options carved out for them. But Cecil doesn't see this simplification – useless verbs aside – as a hindrance. After all, he says, it's very difficult to tell a story if you don't know where the player is or what they're doing. "People want to feel that they're having an effect on the world," he says. "But at its highest level – at the key plot points – we need to keep control."

Cecil, then, must be worried by the success of games like *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and the *Elder Scrolls* series. Left, right and centre, players are trading in powerful *Broken Sword, Syberia* or *Grim Fandango*-like stories for open-ended worlds. Should adventure designers keep pushing their linear prose, or is there another way to keep the punters coming?

>_EVOLVE GENRE

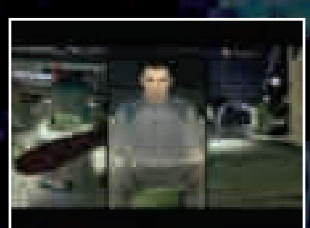
The answer's in the stats – gamers, on the whole, are buying titles that they can play over and over again; adventures are classically a one-off affair. So it would seem that the only way to keep the genre going is to make it replayable.

Schafer says that in the LucasArts adventure days, the issue of replayability was solved by giving up. "We said, 'You know, I don't play adventure games twice' – we were just being honest," he explains. "There's not that many ways to make adventure games replayable in a meaningful way unless you're really going to randomise it. But if you go back and you make it so there are millions of ways to solve a puzzle, there aren't ways to make each solution meaningfully different. You're not going to script and animate 800 different endings. I don't think there's a way to make a story-based game different each time you play."

Cecil concurs that multiple endings don't help an adventure. "I think, in general, the games that have multiple endings are the ones with the weakest narratives because >_

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

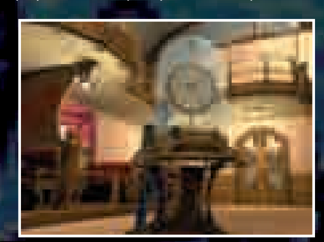
Fahrenheit
Play as a murderer, his brother, a detective and her partner in an "interactive drama" where every choice you make has a consequence. Will Quantic Dream pull it off? In the tradition of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books, turn to page 96 to find out.



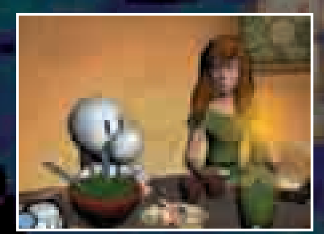
Gumshoe Online
If at first you don't succeed, try something different. That's what developer Hiding Buffalo learned when its hardboiled detective adventure was ignored by publishers. *Gumshoe* is now distributed online in episodes.



80 Days
Basing its game on Jules Verne's *Around The World In 80 Days*, developer Frogwares is promising a real-time 3D adventure that will span the globe. Environments will be dynamic, characters will be numerous, and players will have plenty of land to explore.



Bone
Formed by the development team who worked on the cancelled *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* – Telltale Games – *Bone* is looking to be a very entertaining rendition of Jeff Smith's cult comic. Like *Gumshoe*, *Bone* will be released in episodes.





"MOST PUBLISHERS SIMPLY WILL NOT

GORY STORY
It's curious that an offshoot of the adventure genre became infinitely more popular than the genre itself, but survival horror did just that. In 1993, when *Alone In The Dark* appeared, adventure gamers who had been bred on clumsy pirates, sarcastic bunnies and fantasy kitsch were stunned. Rather than traditional witty characters and colourful scenarios, *AITD* featured a zombie-infested mansion. But unlike in traditional adventures, players could fight back. By using 3D models on 2D backdrops, action became possible.

Then Capcom released *Resident Evil* in 1996 and with the opening and clumsily translated sentence – "Enter the world of survival horror" – a new genre was born. The adventure genre's tedious "combine-metal-pipe-with-wheel-to-make-valve-to-turn-on-fire-hose" puzzles remained, but *Resident Evil* turned graphic adventures into panicked nightmares.

This combination of an oppressive atmosphere and action-based gameplay was a hit. Sure, repetitiveness, frustrating environments and morbid AI earned the genre much criticism, but it also spawned many memorable games such as *Silent Hill* and *Fatal Frame*.

>_ it's difficult to have one great story with three or four different endings. What happens at the beginning and the end should reverberate through the middle. If you really care about the structure of the story then it's not feasible to have three or four endings."

However, Cage disagrees. He thinks it's possible for players to have agency in a story if the designers also have power over them. "I use a writing technique I call 'bending stories' – like a rubber band – for *Fahrenheit*. The player, through their actions, can stretch the rubber band or deform it, but whatever he does the rubber band – the backbone of the story – is still there and guarantees the quality and the pacing of my story. A rubber band is not just one choice in one scene: each action becomes a kind of rubber band by itself. And a rubber band can affect another rubber band in another scene, which will in turn affect another rubber band later in the game. The possible consequences of an action can be followed in a consistent way all the way through."

While Cecil doesn't think you should bend your story too far, Revolution does make an effort to keep players coming back. "I think what you've got to do to make it truly replayable is to put in so many extras that each time you play, you discover new things. In the *Broken Sword* games we use a lot of references. People get very excited by that. And also, it's good to put in subplots that can be triggered. Because I think it's important to feel that you've had your own narrative experience. But those subplots support the main narrative rather than dictate it. In *Broken Sword 3*, we had an area that you could go to with new characters. We were just rewarding people for coming back."

>_SAVE GAME
Cage, Schafer and Cecil are right in their reluctance to make their adventures



FUND BIG ADVENTURE GAMES ANY MORE"

systemic – you just can't tell a story and have the player dictate it. But there is no doubt that adventures need to become more flexible if they are to compete with the *Splinter Cells*, *Doom 3*s, and *Halo*s of today. Those games rely more on artificial intelligence than scripting – enemies don't just wait for you to blast them in the face. In an adventure, characters are effectively statues until you rub them the right way. Perhaps, then, the way to make the player feel in control of their game is to give the world a brain.

"Historically in adventures," Cecil muses, "everything is driven by the player. I don't want to play those games any more. I want games that make you feel like you're part of a living world, rather than one that is static and reactionary. Most adventure people are just changing the story and knocking out the same game. It's very old school."

Cecil has been trying to combat this type of adventure since Revolution's first game, 1991's *Lure Of The Temptress*. The Virtual Theatre engine used for *Temptress* and *Beneath A Steel Sky* allowed characters to live their lives independently of the player. VT seems primitive now, but Cecil regrets not taking the engine as far as it could go. "Virtual Theatre had enormous potential," he laments. But its legacy lived on in 1997's *The Last Express* – the game would literally move forward regardless of the player's progress.

Why isn't this innovation being used today? Well, there's money to worry about. "Graphics didn't help," Schafer says. "The more expensive the graphics are in the game, the fewer options you can have," he explains. "You'd also need some expensive, incredible AI system that could handle the non-linear world-changing. Right now, adventure games are heavily scripted. If you have a game with 100 different animations, and each sequence has 25 animations, then really, you're only going to see four of those. You can put your assets broadly or deeply."

Beyond Schafer's artistic concerns, there's the issue that most publishers just won't fund big adventures any more. It's hard to push the envelope when your wallet's empty, and *The Last Express*, for all its innovation, forced developer Smoking Car Productions more or less to close its doors.

What's the solution, then? Schafer's recent *Psychonauts* managed to integrate his adventure game experience into an action-oriented title, so that's one way. But what about the adventure stalwarts like Cecil, who firmly believe cerebral challenges are the only way to go? Well, that lies in your hands, dear reader. Prove that there still is a market for story-driven adventures by buying them – otherwise, they're only point-and-clicking their way to the bargain bin.



The Players

RYAN SEABURY IS THE MAN WHO HAS BROUGHT US SOME UNIQUE MMORPGS, BUT IT MIGHT NOT HAVE TURNED OUT THAT WAY. THANKFULLY, HE OPTED TO CREATE HIS OWN UNIVERSE RATHER THAN EXPLORING THE REAL ONE…

RYAN SEABURY

NETDEVIL

They've got spikes, you see." Ryan Seabury, design director at NetDevil, begins his brief lesson on marine life. "They destroyed the fishermen's nets and earned themselves a cool name. It was a name that met both the scuba and the sounding-cool requirements." He's explaining why we're surrounded by pictures of big, red, fierce-looking fish. The NetDevil name and logo are the result of company founders Scott Brown and Peter Grundy's love of scuba diving, a passion that co-owner Seabury now shares. "They were looking for something cool like shark or manta ray," he continues, "but there were already several companies with names like that. It needed to be something different."

'Something different' seems apt. At the moment, NetDevil is working on *Auto Assault*, a massively multiplayer online RPG that stands to shake up the genre by moving away from the familiar fantasy setting and focusing on a post-apocalyptic, vehicle-based experience. It's a risky project, but one that fulfils one of Seabury's lifelong ambitions. "I've always said that I would either be an astronaut or create my own universe," he tells us. "The astronaut thing didn't pan out as in the US you need to join the military to stand a chance and that was something I wasn't really up for. Also, having good eyesight and being in great health was essential – I definitely have a programmer's build."

Teaming up with Grundy and Brown was a wise move, and the trio have known each other for some time. "I originally worked with Peter and Scott at a web distance learning company back in the Nineties during the 'dot-com fun times'," Seabury tells us. "Back then, money was flowing like a fountain and it was this company that gave Peter and Scott the nice lump of cash needed to start NetDevil. I also eventually left and started up my own web design company, though I only kept this going for a short while as an opportunity arose at NetDevil and I jumped at the chance."

We're glad he did as having talent such as Seabury working on MMORPG titles at a time when the genre is at an all-time high is a good thing. It's a genre that many studios are keen to invest a lot of time in and Seabury is sure he knows why. "There are a lot of cool aspects in MMORPGs that, until previously, people haven't managed to grasp. I think that *World Of Warcraft* was a door-opener for a lot of people as it made these features accessible. Although there were many early successes in the genre before *WoW*, it took a lot of determination to take on these titles. These early MMOs that just sprang from mud already had set features, well-developed terminology and a lingo of their own that first-generation players were expected to know. Eventually it will get to the point where we've made the games accessible enough so that everyone can enjoy the great things about the genre. A persistent world that continues even when you're not playing – who wouldn't want to be a part of that?"

It's a good point and – with the next-generation machines just around the corner – more gamers than ever are going to be able to enjoy the genre without the hassle and expense of putting a decent gaming PC together. It's something that's going to mean plenty of change for developers like Seabury, so what are his feelings on the matter?

"As a gamer, I'm very excited about it," he says. "The 'from the couch' perspective is a much more relaxed environment – it's far better than being two feet away from a monitor. As a developer, I can't wait to get a title onto the next-gen machines. We're pushing every day and there's all sorts of potential for future projects. I'll be interested to see what the first MMORPG to make it onto consoles will be – I hope it's one of ours. It's something I'm genuinely excited about."

It will certainly be an exciting time for the company. No matter how *Auto Assault* sells, we're fairly sure we'll be hearing from Seabury and NetDevil again, though perhaps from new offices… "Games development is a dream for me, though slightly less hours would be better," Seabury jokes. "Our pipe dream, and something we all talk about in jest, is moving the entire company to Hawaii – you can develop games from anywhere in the world, after all. Unfortunately, our wives won't let us do it. Shame, we're all scuba divers as well so it would be great. Ooh, we could even take a submarine to work…"

Auto Assault is out in Autumn 2005 on PlayStation2 and is previewed on page 70



"COMMAND & CONQUER WAS PROBABLY MY BIG 'OH SHIT, THIS IS SO COOL' GAME"
RYAN SEABURY

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, WE LEAP ALL THE WAY OVER TO VANCOUVER, HOME OF RADICAL.

RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT



YOU DON'T NEED TO BE WELL-KNOWN AMONG GAMERS TO BE A SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPER – RADICAL HAS SPENT WELL OVER A DECADE PROVING JUST THAT. IT MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO PLEASE ALL THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME, BUT KNOWING WHAT IT LIKES CERTAINLY HELPS…

Ever heard of Radical Entertainment? Unless you're particularly au fait with the wide world of game developers, the answer is most likely a big fat 'no'. The studio doesn't have a big industry name attached to it like Lionhead's Peter Molyneux or id's John Carmack, it generally hasn't produced games that can be described as genre-defining and it isn't in the same financial league as developers-cum-publishers like EA or Activision. But that isn't to say Radical hasn't been incredibly busy all this time. In fact, since the studio was founded in 1991 it's grown from a small handful of people to over 230 employees, moved to a 50,000-square-foot facility based in the heart of Vancouver, released a number of well-known – not to mention hugely successful – games and has been labelled one of the 50 best privately owned companies in Canada. Not bad for a developer you've never heard of.



RADICAL SMASH

1 TIM BENNISON
PRODUCER

IN A NUTSHELL: Has worked at Radical for ten years, originally as the studio's technical director for PSone, Saturn and N64 games. Was a lecturer in computer sciences in New Zealand before joining the company.

2 LINDZ WILLIAMSON
PROJECT MANAGER

IN A NUTSHELL: Moved to Radical in 2000 after stints of working as a graphic artist and a production manager in Vancouver's magazine industry. Also has a BA in Russian history.

Of course, the key to all this has been Radical's decision to focus primarily on the creation of licence-based games as opposed to coming up with original IPs. Even in the early days, this trend was prevalent in Radical's output – titles such as *Rocky & Bullwinkle* and *The Terminator* on the NES gave the studio the capital it needed to fund further licensed titles, earning it the chance to work on lucrative NHL, NBA and ESPN sports titles, as well as TV and movie licences such as *Independence Day* and *Beavis & Butthead*. Even today, its biggest games are those based upon recognisable faces, albeit faces that are either yellow, green or hidden behind a mountain of cocaine. But it isn't just a matter of grinding such titles out – the people behind them really are passionate about the things they create.

"I think we've worked really hard at putting out solid games that we are proud of," says Lindz Williamson, one of Radical's project managers. "Part of the culture at Radical is 'work hard, play hard' and we definitely do both very well… although working hard doesn't mean putting in insane hours. Our people are our number-one resource and the only way to make a quality game is to work with people who enjoy coming to work." Indeed, it's hard to imagine that going to work at Radical can be anything other than enjoyable – after all, the company's based in Vancouver (a particularly nice part of Canada), while its offices are equipped with a massive kitchen, gym, games room and a log cabin, no less. Combine that with the company's work ethic of putting people first and it's no wonder it was voted 'best company to work for in British Columbia' last year. But even that's not a guarantee of it being the most attractive opportunity for relocating members of the industry.

> **"MY GOAL IS TO BUILD THE BEST TEAM I CAN SO THAT WE CAN MAKE GAMES THAT INSPIRE PEOPLE"**
> **LINDZ WILLIAMSON, RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT**

"One of the key difficulties faced by our studio is certainly the hiring and retention of top people," admits Tim Bennison, producer at Radical. "It's a war for talent out there, especially in our Vancouver location with so many competing game companies, both large and small, ranging from start-ups to big, established

BUYING THE FARM

After 13 years of independent development, Radical Entertainment was snapped up earlier this year by Vivendi Universal. It makes sense, considering several of Radical's past hits turned into even bigger successes for Vivendi, although any fears that the publisher would set about imposing its own ideals on the studio have yet to be realised. "Being bought by Vivendi Universal has resulted in us being able to focus completely on developing quality games, rather than worrying about where the next milestone payment will come from," says Tim Bennison. "Also, we're a lot more plugged into the marketing of our products than we were as an independent developer. Best of all though, Vivendi hasn't really changed much about the way we run our studio internally, since they like the way we work, which is great."

DRIVING THE LICENCE

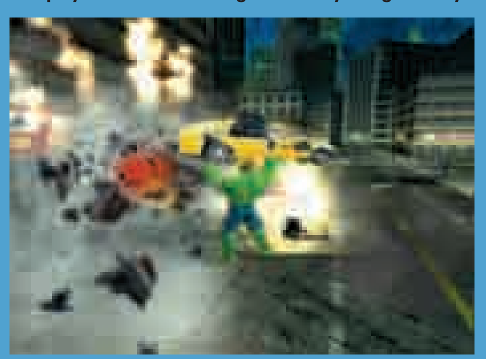
THE SIMPSONS

■ A few eyebrows were raised when *Road Rage* appeared, if only in response to the way the game mercilessly 'borrowed' its concept from *Crazy Taxi*. However, both it and *Hit & Run* (a simple *GTA*-style game) proved hugely popular with gamers; indeed, *Hit & Run* is still riding high in the All Formats chart.



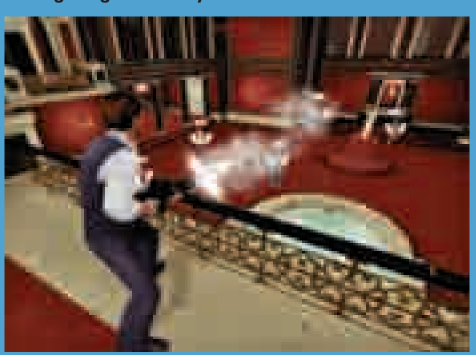
THE HULK

■ A hard franchise to work with, mainly because Hulk's main power – being big and green – doesn't quite have the flair of Spider-Man's aerobatics or Batman's gadgets. That said, *Ultimate Destruction* captures Hulk's 'smash' quite nicely and offers players a wealth of things to destroy along the way.



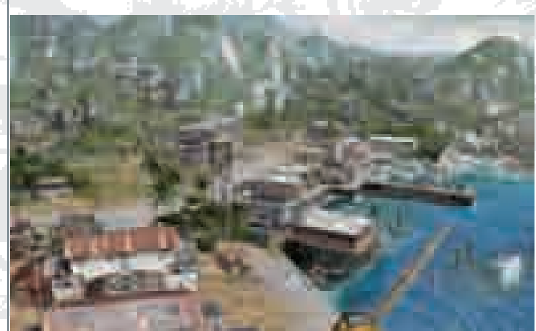
SCARFACE

■ So, how do you revive a dead character for a game that picks up where his movie left off? In Radical's case, by changing history. *Scarface* might be heresy for fans of the film, but Vivendi is expecting big things from Tony Montana's resurrection.



PARADISE LOST

In trying to extend the life of Tony Montana through its new *Scarface* game, Radical has gone about constructing a luxury paradise for you to rule over – the detail in its conceptual art, certainly, is rather lovely. How that will translate onto the PS2 and Xbox, of course, we're not entirely sure although no doubt the developer will do its best.

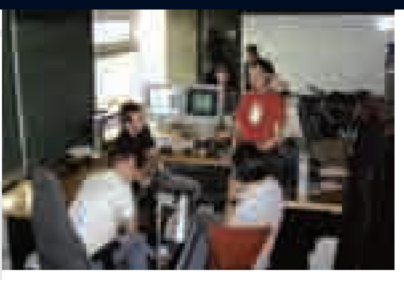


operations." And by 'big, established operations', he is of course referring to Electronic Arts. Located in nearby Burnaby, EA Canada is a constant burden of success that the rest of Vancouver's development community must bear. However, the fact that a number of studios have flourished in Vancouver suggests that the area is doing something right to attract new blood, and expanding companies such as Radical are just the place to start. "Our team size has increased over the past 14 years from a couple of people to over one hundred working on one game," says Bennison. "That's an incredible amount of change in the way we manage our projects. One thing that hasn't changed though is our company culture – we're very proud of the fact that we have a culture of mutual respect; we put people and their families first and we really live our core values. Sure, we make mistakes but we learn from them and never give up trying to improve the quality of our games."

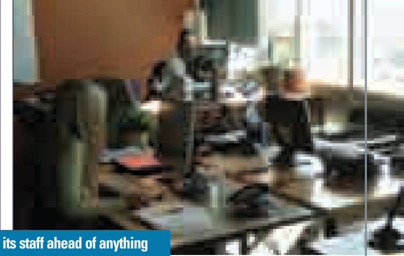
Continual improvement may be expected but it's rare to see a developer admitting that it makes enough mistakes to act as an effective lesson. Yet Radical's modesty is one of the traits that has kept it alive years after other bolder, brasher and more outspoken developers have become nothing more than a footnote in the back of a

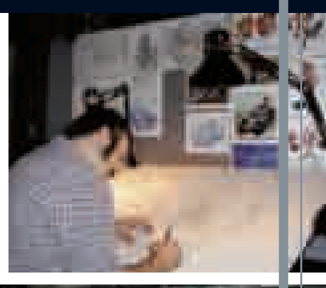
BETTER THE DEVIL

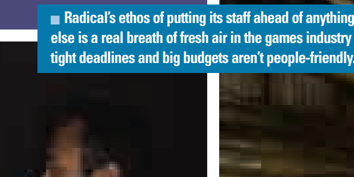
Working on *Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* has meant having to use comic inspiration to come up with Hulk's alternativee personalities. Devil Hulk, for instance, is suitably, er, devilly.











Radical's ethos of putting its staff ahead of anything else is a real breath of fresh air in the games industry – tight deadlines and big budgets aren't people-friendly.



As well as its famous licences, Radical has taken on the *Crash Bandicoot* franchise too.



game manual. By sticking to what it knows best instead of taking huge risks, Radical has become one of North America's biggest studios. "Radical is a specialist in taking a licence and bringing out the essence of that licence in a best-selling game package," says Bennison. "We've certainly had great success with *The Simpsons*, which is a triple-A licence if ever there ever was one. Of course, sometimes you get a licence that seemed great at the start of development but doesn't live up to the hype when the game ships two years later… that's not a good experience. However, we try to pick licences that have long-term potential, with multiple media sources and/or a long history of success." "Licence products can be tricky though, as there are so many different parties involved in signing off on a product," adds Williamson. "Once a team invests time in learning an IP it's usually beneficial for everyone to have them work on the sequel as all the knowledge from the previous game can be transferred. The biggest part of developing an IP is getting the player experience right, so that they feel completely immersed in that world with that character."

Some may consider that what Radical does is essentially what's going wrong with the games industry – an over-reliance on licensed products, weighing down the release schedule and hiding the true gems that appear elsewhere. But then there's the other side, a side that only becomes clear once you meet the people behind these games, working hard in their own little corner of Vancouver. Despite a portfolio that suggests otherwise, Radical is as close to old-school, passion-driven development as you can get. And then there's all the studio's other achievements: the creation of its own middleware (Pure3D), in-house physics and animation studios, experience with handheld and wireless technologies, and even the establishment of the Radical Foundation in 2001 to provide funding, volunteers, equipment and other facilities to projects that help build a better future for children… all from a developer's desire to do what it does best. These people love their jobs, they love what they create and what they can give to gamers. They're genuinely excited about it, especially since they know their games will eventually reach millions of people – the masses, not the hardcore minority. And in an industry, or rather a business, where it's as much about the profits as it is about the quality of your products, how many other developers that you've actually heard of have staff as passionate as that?

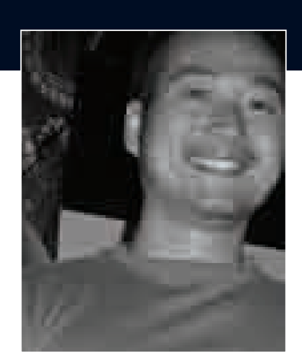
"I LOOK FOR ADDICTIVE FUN IN THE MAIN GAMEPLAY MECHANICS COMBINED WITH THE BEST POSSIBLE POLISH AND PRESENTATION"
TIM BENNISON, RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT

TIME EXTENSION

While building a game around a general licence such as *The Simpsons* is simply a case of putting a range of familiar characters in an extraordinary environment that can be manipulated as a videogame, extending the universe of something as rigid as a motion picture (with its set plot, characters and locations) is somewhat different. Thankfully, Radical's experience means it has learnt the best ways to deal with such challenges. "In the cases of our first *Hulk* game and *Scarface*, we took the approach of extending the movie plot almost as a sequel," admits Tim Bennison. "We've found this provides you with much more creative freedom to build a story that's more suitable for the kind of game you're making, rather than simply repeating the story of the movie. Plus it gives gamers a more interesting, new experience that's still set in the world of the film. The challenge with doing this is that you have to create a new story that lives up to people's expectations, and you still have to satisfy the licence-holder." And considering how picky licence-holders can turn out to be, that's really not as easy as it sounds…



"2D FIGHTING GAMES ARE NOT GOOD FOR THE MARKET AT THE MOMENT"
YOSHIKI OKAMOTO



The Players

THE GODFATHER OF STREET FIGHTER HAS DECIDED TO GO IT ALONE, AND HIS NEW COMPANY, GAME REPUBLIC, IS DETERMINED TO MAKE WAVES WITH ITS NEW SAMURAI TITLE. BUT YOSHIKI OKAMOTO IS FEELING NOSTALGIC…

YOSHIKI OKAMOTO

GAME REPUBLIC

What do you ask the man who created the most respected fighting games of all time, and one of videogaming's most important milestones? Easy – who's your favourite *Street Fighter* character? "Zangief," Yoshiki Okamoto immediately answers. "The character is very similar to my lifestyle – high risk, high return, and I walk around half naked, jumping onto females that don't want me to, to spin them around." Okamoto is awesome – rapturous laughter (his and ours) that fills the room accompanies the whole interview. He's not typically Japanese; he's wise-cracking and laid back with an almost punk rock attitude but not an iota of arrogance.

Okamoto has been in the industry a considerable time, beginning his career at Konami. However, his work at Japanese giant Capcom is more influential and important, and despite being here to promote his new company he doesn't mind talking about past achievements. "I started in the industry at a company called Konami, and after that I joined Capcom, where I was involved in the development of *1942, 1943, Final Fight, Street Fighter II, Resident Evil, Onimusha* and… *Super Mario Bros,*" he says with a straight face, before laughing at the confusion he has caused. Of course, he had nothing to do with *Super Mario*. That's just his little joke.

But it's not every day the chance to quiz the creator of **games™** favourite *Street Fighter II* comes around, and Okamoto is happy to supply us with details. "*Street Fighter II* is a sequel to *Street Fighter I*, which was developed by someone completely different," he explains. "Looking at *Street Fighter I,* there were a lot of things I wasn't happy with." He's clearly keen to distance himself from the universally unpopular original. "I then created *Final Fight* as I thought that the market was not ready for *Street Fighter II* yet, so I created *SFII* using everything I had learned there." So what does he cite as his influences? "I read a lot, so books. Also movies, but mainly conversations with other people are a large creative influence." Anyone doubting the authenticity of Okamoto and his claims to *Street Fighter* is silenced during his post-interview karate demonstration. Suddenly invigorated and exploding with energy, he throws crescent kicks, palm thrusts and even a sly dragon punch, seemingly just for fun. It's clear to see why his games contain so much personality – the man is bursting at the seams with the stuff.

So we have a creative, vivacious developer with *Street Fighter II* under his belt and a heavy involvement with *Resident Evil* and *Onimusha*. Why on earth would he risk it all to start out on his own? "I was fired," he deadpans. The awkward silence is soon replaced by the now familiar sound of Okamoto's belly laugh. "Sorry, that was a joke," he says. "Capcom had become a very large company and getting authorisation for creating a brand new game had become very difficult. A company knows that sequels of established brands will be more likely to make money, but I wanted to make brand new titles." It's encouraging to find there are still figures in the industry who are willing to risk everything just to stick to their guns. "I decided to leave the company, and make my own," he explains. "I'm the CEO of a very small game developing company called Game Republic, which nobody has heard of."

Game Republic's first game, the samurai action title *Genji: Dawn Of The Samurai*, is set to change that. Capturing the essence of films like *Hero* and *House Of Flying Daggers* while keeping its roots in Japanese folklore, it's set to win many admirers when it reaches Europe. Okamoto isn't worried about how the Eastern story will translate for a Western audience, either. "The costumes, the whole 'mysterious orient' thing is very popular and translates to the West," he says. Okamoto knows his markets.

Yoshiki Okamoto is a visionary, self-assured and infinitely entertaining developer. Game Republic has already established a potential franchise with *Genji*, so what can we expect in the future? Not a 2D fighter, unfortunately. "2D fighting games are not good for the market at the moment, so I won't be producing any 2D fighters in the near future," he says. A shame, but the games industry is still a brighter place when Okamoto is around.

Genji: Dawn Of The Samurai is out on PlayStation2 in November and was reviewed in issue 35



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't mean it's necessarily bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning scores are our genuine opinion; we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?



Will we ever get bored of rolling a ball around collecting things? No. Never. So imagine how pleased we are to see this sequel to the amazing *Katamari Damacy*…

Minna Daisuki Katamari Damacy 102



There are a few moments of levity – including this basketball match.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Quantic Dream

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
September
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

FAHRENHEIT

QUANTIC DREAM MAKES COLD THE NEW HOT

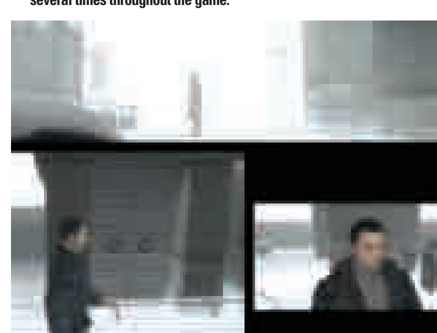
When VU Games decided not to publish *Fahrenheit*, it must have been quite a blow for Quantic Dream. After all, the game has been painted with such a steady, certain hand – and composed with the care and attention to detail of a true master – that it's obvious that David Cage's team has never doubted that its adventure/mystery/ new stab at the point-and-click genre would wholeheartedly work. Well, Vivendi's loss is Atari's brave gain; *Fahrenheit*, while unlikely to sell nearly as many copies as it deserves, is a game any publisher should be proud to have in its portfolio.

While many games highlight the illusion of choice, presenting a list of possible outcomes that actually have a marginal effect on play, *Fahrenheit* revels in its deeply layered narrative and the particularised experience it offers each individual player. It's most apparent when playing through the game for a second or third time. Subtle shifts become noticeable in the direction a scene takes when a different action is chosen; the reactions from NPCs or even characters under your control vary according to what they have learned or been told; you notice a choice you had the first time around is no longer available, and have to mentally backtrack your progress to work out where you changed the outcome of the game. Despite a tightly woven story, *Fahrenheit* is a surprisingly liberal experience in terms of railroading the gamer.

From the opening sweep across Manhattan bay, *Fahrenheit*'s scale and self-assuredness is genuinely exciting; the camera tracks past Liberty Island with a large crow in flight, towards the snow-dimmed lights of NYC, before sweeping down onto the coffee shop where the lead character – and with him, the player – is plunged



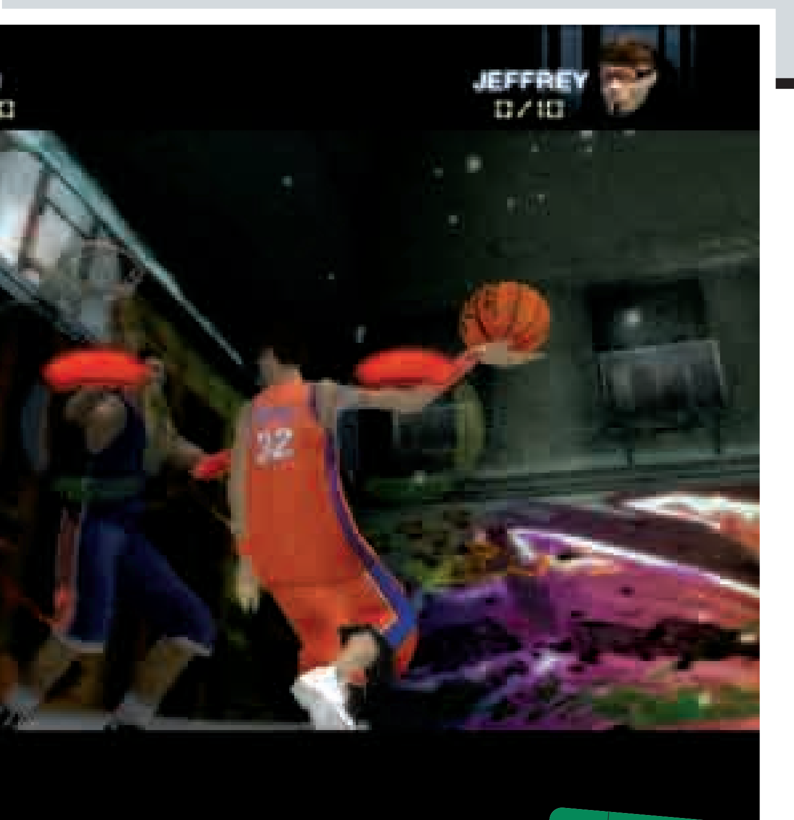
The opening murder is grisly, graphic and returns to haunt Lucas several times throughout the game.



The *24*-style camerawork adds real atmosphere to the adventure.



An old woman's house is filled with squawking birds. Despite being quite typical, many of *Fahrenheit*'s touches are actually very effective.





"WHILE MANY GAMES HIGHLIGHT THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE, FAHRENHEIT REVELS IN THE PARTICULARISED EXPERIENCE IT OFFERS EACH INDIVIDUAL PLAYER"

straight into murder. Lucas Kane, seemingly a dull systems analyst with bad taste in jumpers, remembers nothing of the crime, finding himself compelled to stab out a stranger's heart without understanding why. Immediately, *Fahrenheit* challenges you to think of everything, presenting a set of actions for Lucas – mop floor, hide body, wash hands – that can come back to haunt him much later in the story. Run straight out and the waitress will see Lucas's bloody state; wash your hands and slide back into the diner booth like nothing's happened and the self-carved snake marks on Lucas's wrists will drip forensic evidence for the cops to collect; leave by the back door without paying the bill and, though fewer people will see Lucas, he will leave footprints in the snow.

The level of immersion is commendable, with *Fahrenheit* managing to strike an immediate degree of interest in the game's narrative reminiscent of the intrigue caused by *Broken Sword*'s classic clown-bomb opening. But while controlling George Stobbart through the Parisian bombsite was a simple 'click mouse' mystery, Quantic Dream has found a way to fabricate a strong physical link as well as an emotional one between the player and the onscreen characters. All actions you perform are gesticulated using the right analogue stick, so mopping becomes a back-and-forth sweep of the thumb, while pouring coffee becomes a pick-up-and-tip *Street Fighter*-esque sweep around.

For the most part, the control method is a resounding success, as the subtleties of action expressed with a stick really have an effect on the characters' movement and their behaviour. In short, it enables you to physically play the roles as well as experience the story. A half-hearted 'open door' command becomes a reticent hand reaching for the doorknob, and this delicacy is complemented well by the full range of fluent mo-capped animation on display. The characters even have a depression meter that needs to be kept in check. The developer really has done everything it can to make players care about not just the 'what' and 'why' of the story, but the 'who' as well.

Narratively, it isn't all Lucas' story either. Quantic Dream has created an interactive novel of an experience that blurs the usual, easily identifiable goals of gaming in favour of something far more ambiguous. Once the diner is fled and our unlucky killer is safely in a taxi (or down the subway), the game switches perspectives to two ultra-modern detectives; it's now up to the player how close the cops come to 'discovering' all the evidence left by Lucas. At first it seems like a strange design choice, but understanding why Quantic Dream has chosen to award the player this amount of freedom with the storyline is key to the overall experience.

Fahrenheit flips between these three (and other) characters throughout, with some scenes

games™

FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

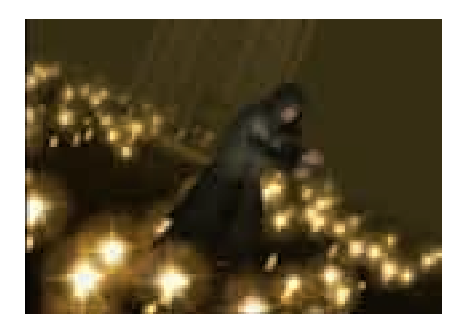
ODD COUPLE: *Fahrenheit* combines point-and-click gaming with a satisfying rhythm-action mode.

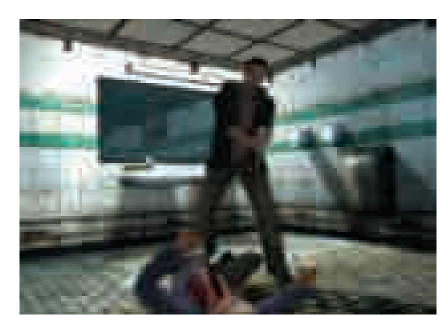
BUTTON DEPRESSION: Keep the characters happy or the cold weather will affect their wellbeing.

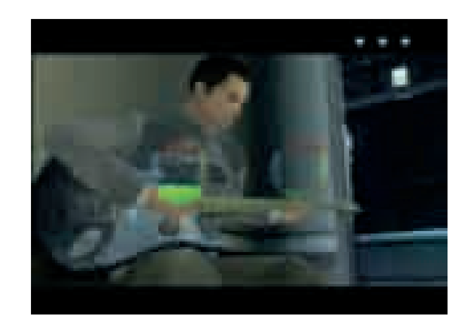
KILLER SEX

At a time when puritanical social moralists around the world are pretending to be shocked by hidden sex in *San Andreas*, it's worth noting that *Fahrenheit* also features its fair share of 'adult' scenes, and approaches them in a far more mature manner than the Hot Coffee mod. For example, a visit from Lucas' ex-girlfriend can result in a number of possibilities; it takes a clever choice of responses and an analogue-flicking mastery of the guitar to woo her into bed for one final fling. Because of the character connection in *Fahrenheit*, the difference between Lucas awakening from a nightmare alone or with someone sleeping by his side is quite palpable. Needless to say, all sexual activity has already been castrated from the game's US release, as sex is pornography regardless of context. If only Bill Hicks were alive…









"QUANTIC DREAM HAS BECOME A STUDIO TO WATCH CLOSELY – FAHRENHEIT IS AN ABSORBING, MATURE VIDEOGAME, THE LIKES OF WHICH WE SADLY SEE ALL TOO RARELY"

FAQs

Q. SO, IS IT A POINT-AND-CLICK GAME?
Kind of, but it's also an action game, and a rhythm-action game. And a book.

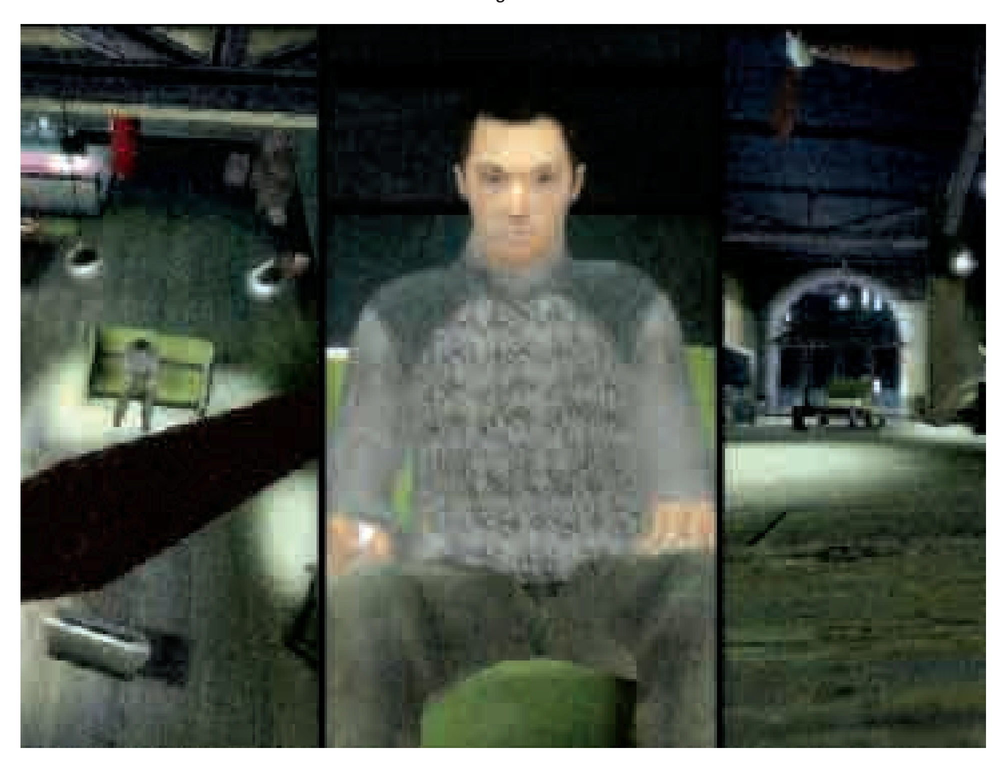
Q. BUT I DON'T READ MUCH.
That's okay; it still follows many standard game methods, it just layers its story very differently to other games.

Q. BUT IS THERE A GAME IN THERE SOMEWHERE?
It's all game, and we guarantee you'll be surprised how attached you get to it by the end.

enabling multiple characters to experience them together. As it progresses further – and the story becomes more supernatural, the cataclysmic events encroaching upon the characters – it's like driving a group of people somewhere without ever knowing your destination, and it makes for a fascinating journey. Like a great book, you can plough through *Fahrenheit* in a single antisocial weekend, but it will keep you thinking about it, and drawing you back until you've unravelled all its mysteries.

It helps that Cage's script – while often cheesier than a ripe Gorgonzola – permits its characters to show such strong personalities. It's not even limited to the main protagonists, whose stories overlap and roam into one another before their inevitable last-act convergence. Minor characters – such as detective Carla Valenti's gay neighbour or detective Tyler's insecure girlfriend Samantha – are included in a way that gives them room to show distinct individuality beyond their narrative purpose. In fact, Lucas is probably the least interesting of all the characters, his maddening façade colder than the sub-zero New York in which the story is set. But this is the beauty of showing so many faces of the story. Sure, it's bookish but it enables players to take sides if they so desire, or just be thorough and see just how much Cage's team has managed to include.

With all this subtle interaction in evidence, the concept of bemani-style pad-waggling for the action scenes may seem out of place, but this also fits in surprisingly well (though many gamers will find themselves torn between watching either the

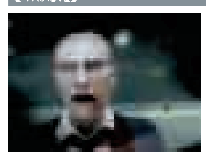


Even a quiet moment in *Fahrenheit* is made more disconcerting by the cinematography. However, it still manages moments of genuine warmth despite all the cold.



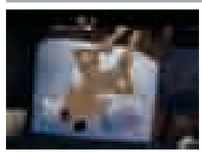
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

2 MINUTES



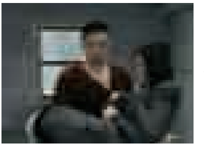
Panic sets in… we've murdered someone and we've got the choice of mopping the floor, hiding the weapon, washing our hands, dumping the body or just legging it.

3 HOURS

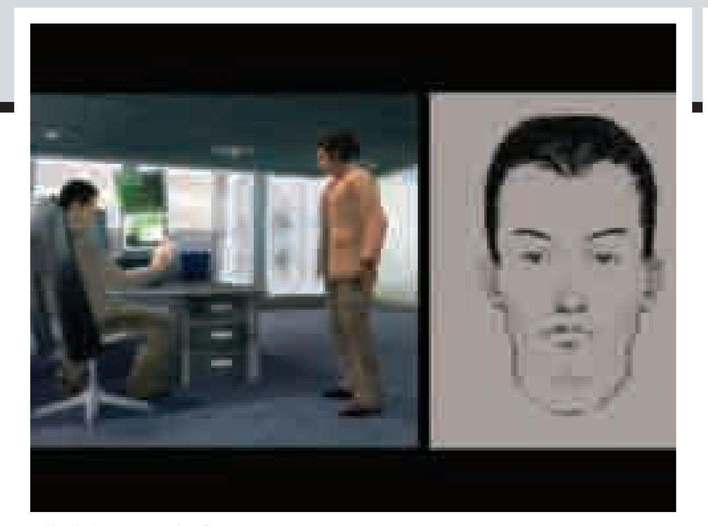


We've persuaded Lucas' ex to stay the night after replaying a scene several times. *Fahrenheit* lets you split saves, starting an old scene with a new save to explore its possibilities.

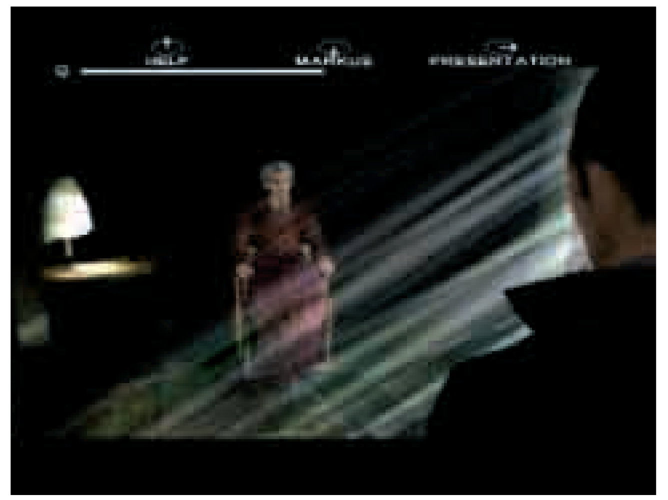
2 DAYS



Allegiances have shifted, new faces been introduced, the cataclysm has begun to show itself and the storylines have converged. You'll be getting excited about exploring it all again.



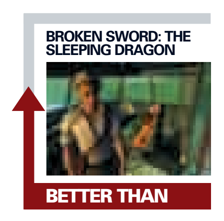
You design your own photofit for the police to track Lucas by. But just how accurate do you want it to be?



Simon Says lights appear onscreen or the *Dragon's Lair*-style flowing animation in the background). Again, many of the actions mimic the moves the characters make, so the control and sense of immersion are never lost despite the sudden jar of having 'Get Ready' and 'Great!' appear on screen every few beats. A fair number of challenges require this method of control, from basketball to guitar to escaping from a swarm of giant radioactive fleas, and they're well positioned throughout the story as well as increasingly, frustratingly difficult to complete flawlessly.

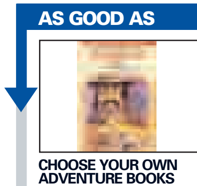
Inevitably for a title with so much ambition and scope, there are elements that buckle under the weight of their own expectation. The internal fixed camera system needs to refresh more quickly between angles (so you don't start walking in the wrong direction), and two stealth sections set in Lucas' youth on a military base are almost certainly horrid enough to stop many gamers in their tracks. But as Quantic Dream has listened to criticism well at various stages of development – each stage of code we have seen has been heavily tweaked over the previous version – the final product may well address these, with the team working to the eleventh hour to ensure the finished product succeeds as smoothly as possible. After the epic but scrappy *Omikron* showed its potential, Quantic Dream has become a studio to watch closely. *Fahrenheit* is an absorbing, mature videogame, the likes of which we see all too rarely.

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE BOOKS

VERDICT 8/10
AN OUTSTANDING, INNOVATIVE GAME

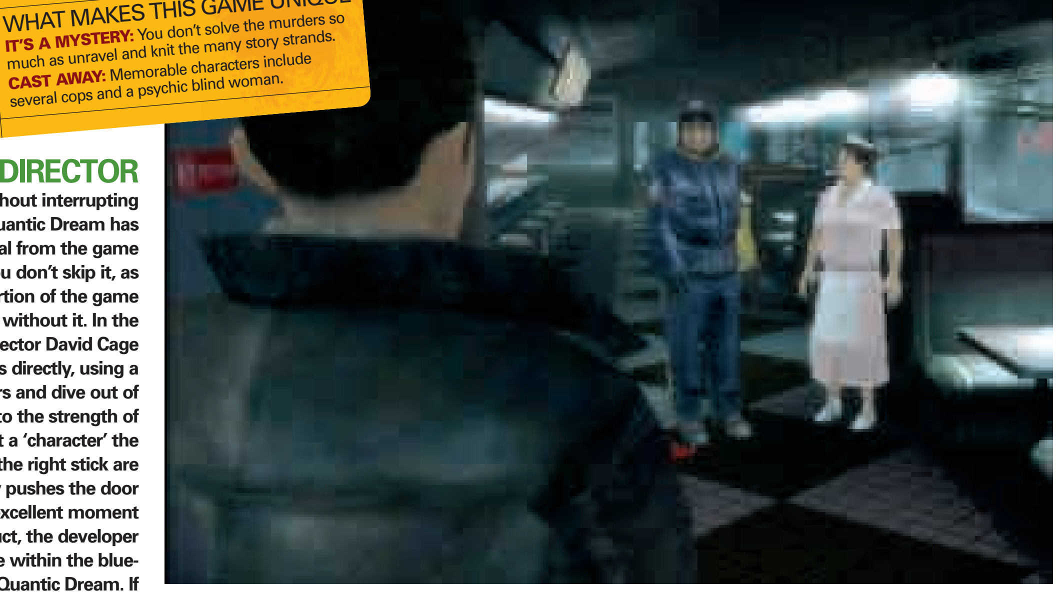
games™
FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

IT'S A MYSTERY: You don't solve the murders so much as unravel and knit the many story strands.

CAST AWAY: Memorable characters include several cops and a psychic blind woman.

MEET THE DIRECTOR

In order to begin the story without interrupting the flow of the drama, Quantic Dream has separated the control tutorial from the game itself. And we'd recommend you don't skip it, as the initial hide-the-evidence portion of the game is an incredible challenge without it. In the tutorial, *Fahrenheit*'s writer/director David Cage teaches the player the controls directly, using a crash test dummy to open doors and dive out of the way of cars. It's testament to the strength of the engine that even without a 'character' the subtleties of control using the right stick are evident, as the dummy slowly pushes the door open. Additionally, in another excellent moment of smug certainty of its product, the developer has set the entire sequence within the blue-screened mo-cap studio at Quantic Dream. If only we had that level of confidence.

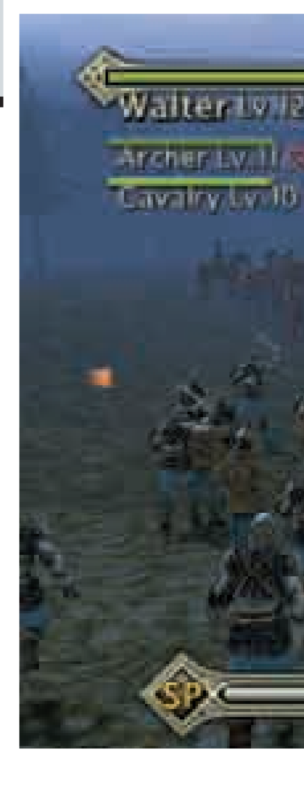


Many of the game's scenes can play out in very different ways – wait around at the beginning, for instance, and you'll get spotted by this cop.

THIS KINGDOM FOR A HORSE? SOUNDS LIKE A FAIR SWAP…

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: HEROES





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Korea

PUBLISHER
Deep Silver

DEVELOPER
Phantagram

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
September '05

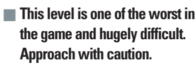
PLAYERS
1 (1-6 Online)

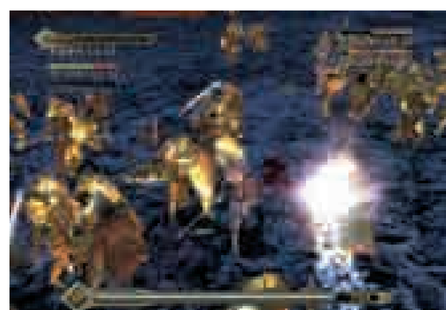
Thanks to natural progressions such as superior graphics and bigger development teams, it's easy for game sequels to improve on their predecessors. After all, developers can refine a game's engines, feedback can be used to solve problems found in the original title, and improvements can be added that were initially deemed too ambitious or expensive. Granted, you'll always have missteps such as *Silent Hill 3* or *Devil May Cry 2*, but they're fairly rare. Considering how much we enjoyed *Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders*, then, it saddens us to reveal that Phantagram's sequel isn't a patch on the original game, even if it does have the odd flash of brilliance among its lengthy campaigns.

What's most frustrating about *Heroes* is that everything starts off so promisingly. If you were awed by the chaotic battle scenes in *KUF: The Crusaders*, you'll be pleased to hear that Phantagram has seriously upped the ante and delivered some breathtaking combat sequences for *Heroes*. It's not uncommon to have up to 200 warriors onscreen at any one time and the result looks absolutely stunning – especially as just as much attention has been paid to the varied environments. Tall grass blows lazily in the wind, burning villages give off a lovely haze effect, while verdant fields turn from lush meadows to decaying death traps over the course of a battle. Meanwhile, deadly wyverns wheel through the war-torn skies, hordes of enemies recklessly rush your troops, while archers let rip with devastating volleys of arrows. It's an exhilarating experience that's enhanced by the solid rock music (that admittedly won't appeal to all) that pumps away in the background, although the less said about the dire voice acting the better.

The intense, bloody combat was *The Crusaders*' main draw and it's pleasing to see that Phantagram has added the odd nip and tuck to ensure that the battles in *Heroes* are just as enjoyable. Underlings can now be summoned with a simple stab of the Black or White buttons and it's become much easier to chain together elaborate combos to defeat your countless foes. You'll often find yourself lost in a sea of flailing bodies and it's in these instances that chinks begin to appear in *Heroes*' solid armour.

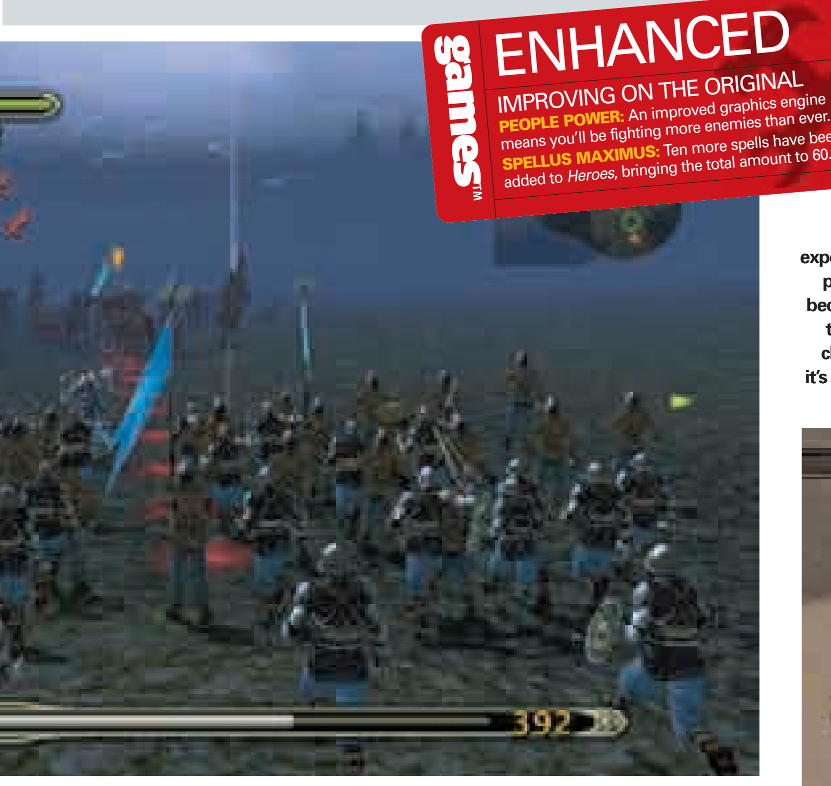
One of the easiest ways to turn a battle in your favour in *The Crusaders* was to locate your opponent's leader and hastily dispatch them. Due to the sheer amount of enemies onscreen now it


This level is one of the worst in the game and hugely difficult. Approach with caution.



Using the map to control your forces isn't as effective as it was in *The Crusaders*.





ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

PEOPLE POWER: An improved graphics engine means you'll be fighting more enemies than ever.

SPELLUS MAXIMUS: Ten more spells have been added to *Heroes*, bringing the total amount to 60.

■ So, which one's the captain then? Chances are, you won't be able to find him…

becomes practically impossible to track down an opposing captain and you'll find yourself losing vast amounts of soldiers as you desperately slash away at hordes of enemies. It's hugely frustrating and adds an unnecessary challenge to what is an already unforgiving game. Indeed, it's the sheer difficulty that proves to be one of *Heroes*' biggest flaws. There's nothing more frustrating than sailing through several missions on your first attempt only to hit a ridiculously hard difficulty spike that takes hours to pass. What's worse is that when you do finally succeed you often feel that it's more down to luck than skill.

Combat isn't the only section of *Heroes* that has been hamstrung, though. The enjoyable real-time strategy sections have also suffered some clumsy treatment. While you can still use the Y button to move all your troops at once, you'll often find that one of your groups hasn't joined the others and is instead aimlessly running around in a circle; only manually selecting them allows your quest to continue. This lack of decent AI is also apparent in long-range encounters and you'll often be staggered by your opponents' stupidity. Send a squad of Mortars out to attack enemies at long range and you can just watch your foes' energy bar diminish while they fail to retaliate in any way. Move one of your other squads away from your Mortars though, and they'll immediately draw the enemy towards them. It's completely baffling, especially as this never happened in the original game.

And that's *Heroes*' biggest problem: for every little step of improvement Phantagram has taken, it takes a giant leap back. Newcomers will wonder why there was so much fuss about the first game, while fans of the original will no doubt gnash their teeth with frustration at the developer's bizarre design choices. *Heroes* is still a competent title, but it falls way short of the magic that made *The Crusaders* such a joy to play.



LEVEL UP? EVENTUALLY…

While many of the problems of *The Crusades* have been ironed out here, one annoying aspect of the original game has filtered through. Though you earn experience points at the end of every battle, you only get to spend them at certain points in the game; as a result you'll often find yourself woefully underpowered because you can't enhance your men before a battle. Once you do finally manage to boost your troops you'll then find that your opponents don't pose much of a challenge… until you start approaching the next level-up point, of course. While it's possible to revisit certain castles (where you perform your levelling up) at later stages of the game, it's most noticeable on each campaign's early levels.



FAQs

Q. SO, MORE CAMPAIGNS?
Hell yes – how does a total of seven grab you?

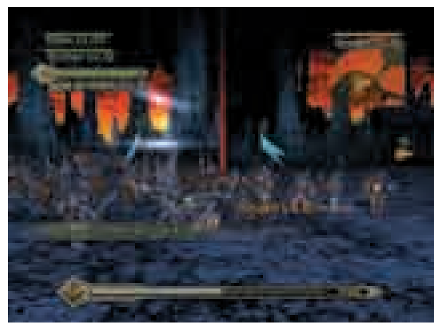
Q. BETTER ONLINE SECTION?
Very much so. There are three main modes and up to six players can participate at once.

Q. BETTER VOICE ACTING?
Afraid not. If anything it's worse than before and completely kills the game's epic scale.

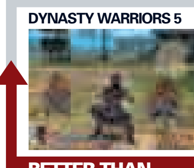


VERDICT 6/10

NOT DREADFUL, BUT A DISAPPOINTING SEQUEL



DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

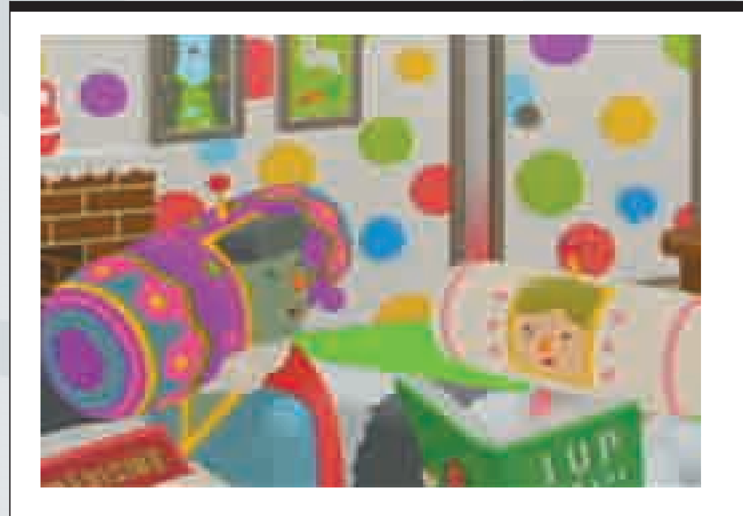


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: THE CRUSADERS





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥5,800

RELEASE
Q1 '06 (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

THIS IS HOW WE ROLL…

MINNA DAISUKI KATAMARI DAMACY

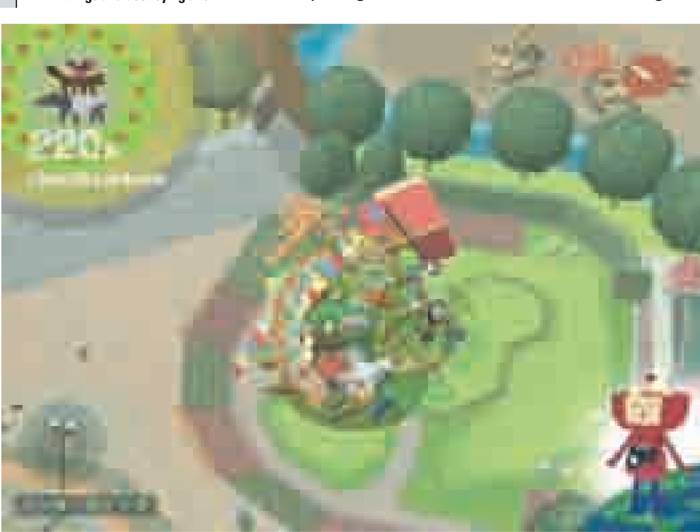
This review has to begin with us telling you how much we loved *Katamari Damacy*. 'A lot' is the simple answer. It may not have been the longest game, nor the most challenging, but it had a charm that forced you to continue playing long after the enjoyment of rolling things into a big ball really should have petered out. If you missed the first game then the concept's going to sound strange, but yes, it was essentially a game about rolling over lots of things to make a giant ball (or Katamari) that would get turned into a star in the sky. It was odd, addictive, featured some of the best tunes ever, and we were more happy than can be healthy when we found out about the sequel.

Something else that occurred to us was that the sequel would contain 'improvements' – the very things that have can ruin a second outing, and for a game that seemed nigh-on perfect it appeared inevitable that if anything was to change we were going to be very unhappy. As it happens – initially, at least – it seems as if there are very few differences between *Minna Daisuki Katamari Damacy* and the original. Within a few moments of playing we immediately rediscovered the glee that was felt while playing *Katamari Damacy* and soon realised that we were going to have an equal amount of ball-rolling fun this time around.

Most of the people in the world of *Minna Daisuki Katamari Damacy* think that the game's leading man, the Prince, is a bit of a hero after he tidied up in the first game. In fact, they're so in awe of his thing-collecting talents that they have a truckload of requests for new stars for him to work on. You have to chat to these people, plead their case to the King, then set about rolling up whatever it is they want their star to consist of. Easy. And it's even easier if you've played the first game. The control system is the same, objects larger than you are still your biggest worry and it's still satisfying making an entire town cower before the mass of your Katamari when just eight minutes ago you were struggling to pick up paperclips.

It all seems so familiar but the package is a fair way smoother than the first title. Rather than foolishly overhauling any of the key elements of the game, Namco has tweaked many of the finer points to create a title that plays better than ever. The level design has had the biggest makeover and attaching the greatest possible amount of stuff to your Katamari is a far more intricate affair than it

There's nothing more amusing than creating a huge ball of things and destroying a town.



FAQs

Q. BIGGER THAN BEFORE?
Not really – it still won't take too long to see all the stages.

Q. REPLAYABLE THOUGH?
Oh yeah. You can spend an awful lot of time bettering those scores.

Q. CRAZY TUNES?
Arguably crazier than last time.



The people of the land will ask you to collect up special Katamari, such as these flowers. Aww.

THE MUSIC MAN

One of the many elements that made you sit up and take notice of the original *Katamari* game was the ear-bendingly mad soundtrack to the ball-rolling action. With many tunes sounding like nothing more than one man going on a humming frenzy, it was embarrassing when you found yourself whistling them on the bus. Of course, you soon found out that there was no need to feel shame, as we doubt that there's a gamer out there who can deny that the music played a large part in the game's overall appeal and each tune soon became more of a *Katamari* anthem rather than a simple piece of music. Well, you'll be pleased to hear that the madcap ditties are back and are as insane as ever. From J-pop through to a bit of disco, Namco has managed to put together another perfect soundtrack for us to enjoy.

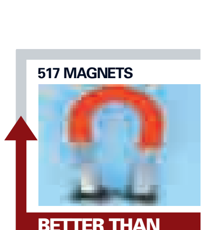
was before, with unlikely paths and 'secret' areas forming a base for potential mastery if you care to spend enough time exploring.

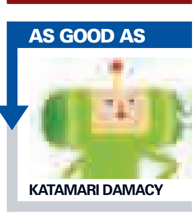
Unfortunately, this mastery doesn't really extend to the multiplayer modes. As before, as enjoyable as they are, the competitive modes are made particularly difficult because the vertically split screen restricts your vision – something that really isn't a wise design move in a game of this nature. That said, the co-op modes work far better and prove a fair test of your knowledge of the game mechanics with one player controlling the direction and the other the speed of the Katamari.

Also enhanced are the stages themselves. In *Katamari Damacy* some levels required you to avoid certain objects and or perhaps hunt down the largest example of a particular animal, but the latest instalment goes all out with themed levels that display far more imagination. Say a young lady asks you to roll up some flowers to make a pretty pink star. After getting the King's permission you can enter the level, where the sky is pink, butterflies are everywhere and soothing music tempts you to relax. You can't. You have to grab loads of flowers in next to no time – it's great. A spot of snowman building and even feeding up a sumo so he can take out his opponent are just a few of the other stages on offer.

Sure, it may all seem a little samey, but with treats like this we're more than happy to go through it all again. While it seems contrary to our fear of 'same again' sequels, *Minna Daisuki Katamari Damacy* had such a strong original on which to build that we're sorry we ever thought we could be disappointed.









It's not just a Katamari you'll be rolling around. Snow, fire and even sumo wrestlers will require a bit of a shove.



RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

ZIPPY, GORGEOUS BUT SLIGHTLY BUNGLED

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
UK

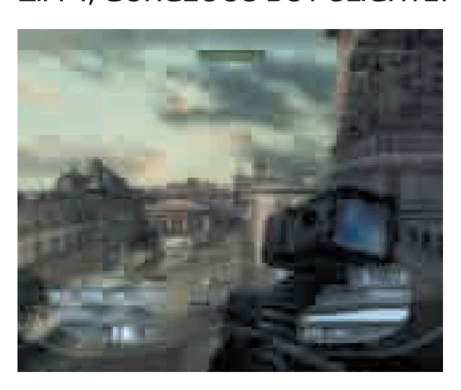
PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

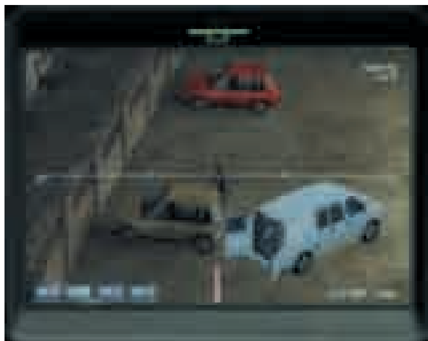
DEVELOPER
Red Storm

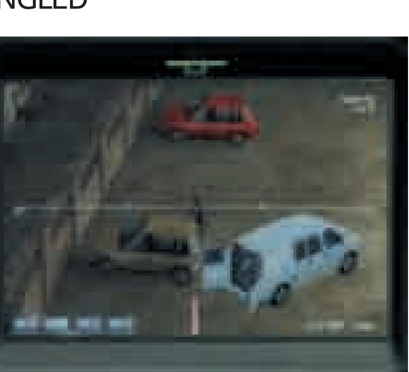
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now
(PC: TBA '06)

PLAYERS
1-4 (16 online)



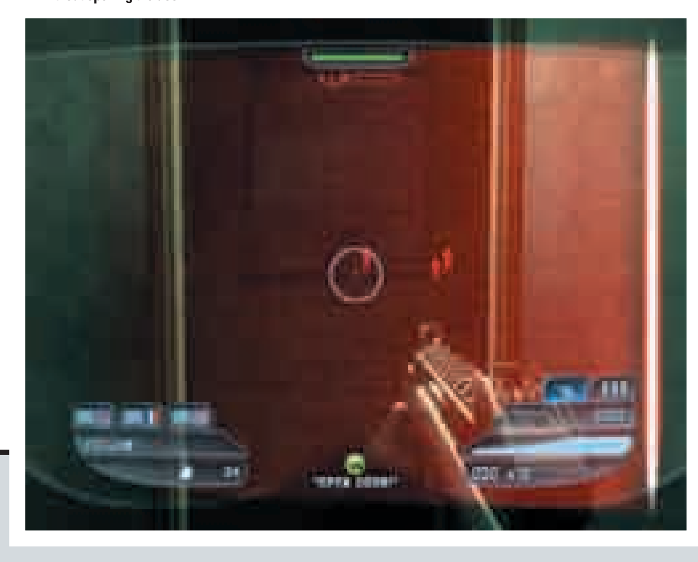




If you're one of those people who looks to the score before reading the review – and, let's face it, most of us are – don't fear the early death of the brilliant *Rainbow Six* series. *Lockdown* is a decent game worth many happy hours of tango battering, but it just feels like it's taken a few too many hits to the head itself.

We'll get the biggest downside out of the way first: everybody is stupid. Enemies show flashes of intelligence, taking cover and generally showing concern for their own lives, but at the next corner you can shoot a goon in the leg and he'll turn slower than a cruise liner to offer any resistance while you stuff a grenade down his pants and hide behind a nearby skip. And then there's your Rainbow squad, a collection of boys who certainly aren't too bright. The refreshing news is that you've got a few more operatives taking turns to offer support, making a total of eight happily non-stereotypical continental cousins ready to save the world rather than the ageing four-man troop. The downside is that they obviously missed the training days where you're taught to shoot people and how to avoid getting dazed and confused by each other's presence. Each mission has its stats and at the end of each level you can expect around a 20 per cent hit rate. Your squad will fire a similar amount of bullets but is likely to average around three per cent. Thanks, lads.

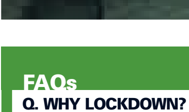
Luckily, as you'd expect, the game still looks great and plays with a lot more intelligence. A solid engine brings the best out of those rag-doll physics and effects we love so much and the visual quality of the cut-scenes is about as good as it gets. The command options work in much the same way with some smooth point-and-click manoeuvres that have been impressively implemented with a couple of tweaks and new moves to make the game even more comfortable to play than before. There are no more 'can't do



Use the heartbeat sensor to get a great view of the enemy without opening the door.

MULTI-COLOURED RAINBOW

***Rainbow Six* has always been a series that has led the multiplayer market – becoming a key reason why many people are hooked up to Xbox Live – and *Lockdown* should be no different. Up to 16 players can battle it out on ten huge maps, now playing as Rainbow operatives or mercenaries. As well as the standard gaming styles *Lockdown* also features the Persistent Elite Creation mode. This allows you to create and maintain your very own operative, choosing your looks and skills, and have them all saved online. Gaining online experience earns points that can be spent on new outfits or upgrading weapons. It's not going to bring about a huge gulf between rookies and veterans but it offers some classic clan potential. Oh, and sorry PS2 owners – this one's Xbox Live exclusive.**

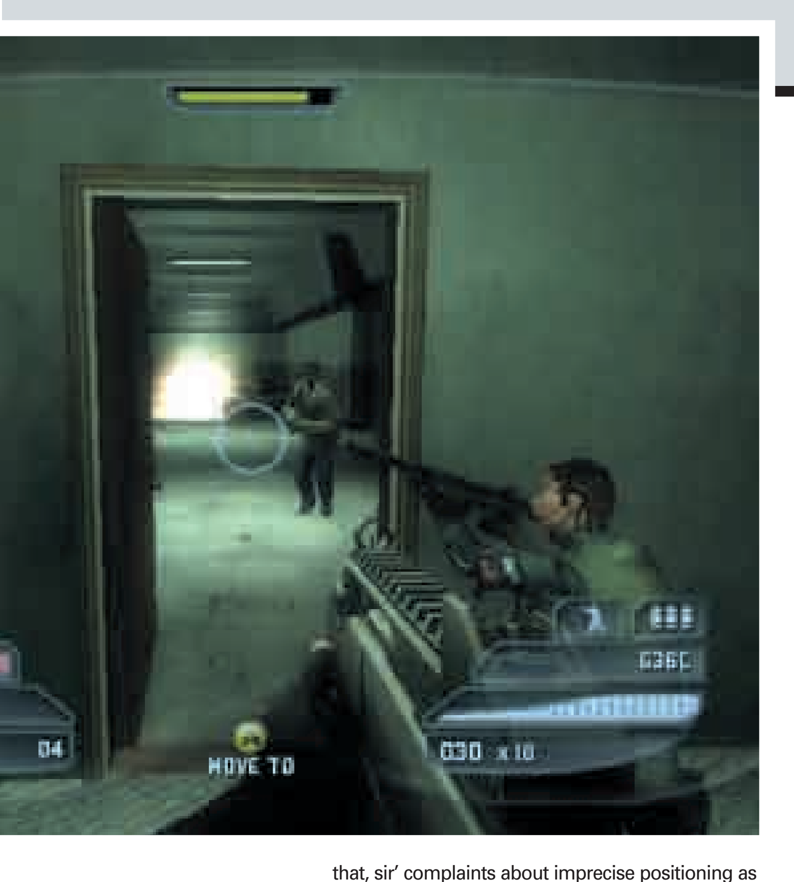


FAQs

Q. WHY LOCKDOWN?
Probably because *Lock Up* was a shit Sylvester Stallone movie from the Eighties.

Q. A DYING FRANCHISE?
Well, this isn't exactly flogging dead horses but we're gagging for some original ideas.

Q. LIKE THE MULTIPLAYER?
Absolutely. It's much more fun without stupid AI characters and is the best reason to buy the game.



that, sir' complaints about imprecise positioning as the nearest point is automatically selected. Your squad won't shoot anything but at least you can easily tell them where to miss from. Another plus is that the new HUD works well, although when your health is very low it cracks and blurs your vision which, though possibly realistic, is also bloody annoying. By contrast, you've also now got the very bloody useful heartbeat sensor that can identify people standing behind walls and doors. It's not quite an organ donor transplant, but it does save lives.

The stupid squad has two key repercussions: one is that you'll learn to love the excellent multiplayer options even more; the co-op mode with up to four players feels like a Godsend while the online features are up there with all the previous *Rainbow* games. Secondly, *Lockdown* becomes a more entertaining one-man shooter than the tedious team action the early *Rainbow* games occasionally required. You won't care for their welfare and only need them if you're running low on health and want a decoy so you're free to tackle a mission at whatever pace or in whatever style you prefer. It's like Ron Pickering yelling 'Away you go!' at the end of *We Are The Champions*.

Once levels have been completed in Campaign mode you can return to some locations at any time for some shortened mini-games. One of these lets you revisit the sniper sections where you switch from the iconic figure of Ding Chavez to the heavy-breathing German Dieter Webber to offer long-distant support to your team.

MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



RAINBOW SIX: BLACK ARROW

■ You can enlist the help of your squad in Terrorist Hunt but we've still to find a reason why.

■ The command structure remains the same but the infamous Zulu call is replaced by the much duller Go Code.

Unsurprisingly, the squad isn't too sharp so it can be quite hard work keeping them alive. The Terrorist Hunt and Lone Hunt modes take you back to clear a level, either of a set number of bad guys or as many as you can bag against the clock. These aren't as much fun as monkeys playing mini-golf, but they're still a nice break from the pressures of saving the world.

It does seem now that many of these franchises, particularly Ubisoft's *Splinter Cell* and *Ghost Recon* follow-ups, are becoming dependent on the multiplayer action to keep themselves alive. Sixteen missions should keep the single player going for plenty of hours but developers need to accept that everyone now has Xbox Live or lives in a flat with three beaver-keen gamers. In this particular instance, it seems Ubisoft may just have lost sight of that and let too many annoyances slip into *Lockdown* to place this *Rainbow* way up high. But if you can live with it then this still adds up to a solid, fun shoot-out that will lead to many days of glorious sunshine.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SCREEN HEROES: The cinematics throughout the game are, for want of no other word, awesome.

FACE VALUE: The new HUD looks cool, but surely a bullet hole in the visor would mean instant death?



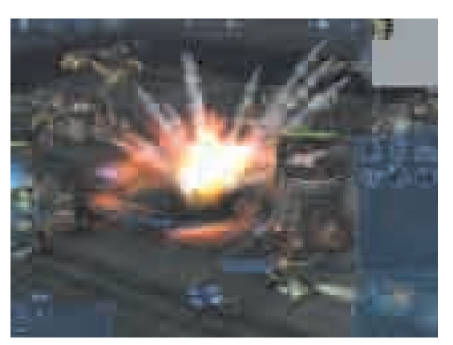
COOL, BUT NOT THE MOST COLOURFUL RAINBOW AROUND

PS2 £39.99

It's still good stuff but the flaws remain. The PS2 loses a bit of colour, the HUD differs slightly and the heartbeat sensor is replaced with a less stylised motion sensor. But while the online content is a few modes short of the Xbox, a new Team Rivalry shoot-out is on offer.


Sci-fi jetpacks and aerial assaults seem to be all the rage these days – so very Bond, minus the ladies and fast cars, of course.


Try all you want, son, you'll still never be as cool as Boba Fett. But hey… at least they won't make you look rubbish in a prequel.


Huge explosions are very much the norm here, although you'll need a fairly solid PC in order to actually see them at their best.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Poland

PUBLISHER
Deep Silver

DEVELOPER
Reality Pump

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium IV/AMD 1500+ processor, 512Mb RAM, DirectX 9 video card with 256Mb RAM, 2Gb HDD space

"EARTH, MAN – WHAT A SHITHOLE"

EARTH 2160

When you see someone in the hardware section of a game store fishing for a top-end graphics card, you might think they're maxing out their PC for a bit of extra polish on *Doom 3*. What you definitely wouldn't think is that they're shelling out on hardware just to be able to play a real-time strategy game. Oh, how times change. *Earth 2160* is the latest instalment in Reality Pump's intricate point-and-click odyssey, and the Polish developer feels that RTS titles should look every bit as lavish as the most resource-hungry FPS or RPG. Indeed, the level of visual detail here is remarkable, squeezing every last pixel of performance out of Direct X and pushing even high-end PCs to the limit. The problem is that, for all the graphical firepower on display, the game itself really doesn't offer anything all that special.

One of *2160*'s key features is its modular construction mechanic, which manifests itself in the extensive vehicle construction feature. Using the ridiculously vast 'tech tree' (think family tree but with weapon components) you research various technologies to unlock an impressive array of weapons, engines, armour and so on that you can bolt onto the basic vehicles' chassis to create almost limitless war machine variations. While this undeniably adds an intriguing dynamic to the prosaic unit-building process, irrespective of how you trick out your units it's still the player with greater numbers and better deployment that's victorious, rendering the modular construction feature more of an interesting curiosity than a heavyweight gameplay element, and that's really the story of *Earth 2160* in a nutshell.

Perhaps the biggest gripe with *2160* is its genetic make-up: it's hardcore, throwback, old-school RTS fare all the way, so be prepared for extended periods of clock watching while your forces harvest credits, build units and generally do everything but engage in combat. Of course, for many this is the very heart of great RTS gaming, but the fact is that after the recent spate of hybrid real-time titles (such as *Codename: Panzers* and *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII*), reverting to the stoic sobriety of plodding resource management seems like a definite step backwards.

What we're left with is a standard RTS title with plenty of sound and fury that actually signify very little. It's an unapologetically hardcore experience that excludes all but the most ardent RTS enthusiasts and feels almost archaic against the evolved real-time format adopted by other recent titles. Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in; aim at *Earth 2160* and you get neither.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
MODISH: Trick out your units with armaments, weapons and underfloor lighting (not really).
VIRTUAL AGENTS: Assist players with specific tasks on the battlefield or act as team manager.

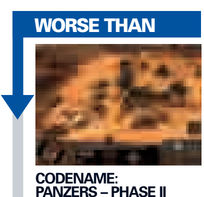
These death machines could be sent back in time to stop the future… or something.





BETTER THAN

EARTH 2150

WORSE THAN

CODENAME: PANZERS – PHASE II

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

PUBLIC TRANSPORT



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

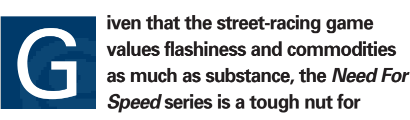


NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

WE'LL TAKE THE SECOND OPTION PLEASE



187 RIDE OR DIE



Given that the street-racing game values flashiness and commodities as much as substance, the *Need For Speed* series is a tough nut for genre newcomers to crack. EA's vast war chest has allowed it to sign the soundtrack, the cars and the cleavage to muscle its rivals off the track. This leaves two options available for the competition – outperform *NFS* in the racing stakes or successfully connect with street-racing culture to cover up shortcomings elsewhere. In *187 Ride Or Die*'s case, it's managed neither.

The main problem here is that the game simply lacks the speed to compete. The handling feels too stiff to really convey the sensation of whipping around corners at high velocity and the speed-boost pick-ups only show you what could have been. The overall speed has been slowed down to allow for a car combat element where your passenger takes potshots at rival cars. This proves neither tactical nor enjoyable enough to compensate for the lack of speed, as combat boils down to merely hammering the shoot buttons when another car pootles into range. The bonus levels that build on this, such as the shoot-out in the parking lot, are equally poor and prove even more tiresome than the main attraction.

In trying to go deeper into the street-racing culture than its rivals, *187 Ride Or Die* has only succeeded in capturing every vacuous and irritating element of the subculture it's emulating, with each new car you unlock seemingly no different to the last and the heavy-handed approach to ghetto slang and swearing testing your patience. You might think this is irrelevant to how *187 Ride Or Die* fares as a videogame but the contrived use of "gangsta" and "playa" means it's hard to care with what's happening. Indeed, it actually manages to make the crass *Need For Speed Underground 2* look classy and refined.

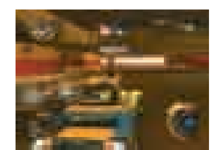
Compared to EA's licensed juggernaut, the bland original soundtrack and lack of big-name cars is a big minus for Ubisoft's racer. In fact, comparisons with any other game in the genre leave *Ride Or Die* wanting, with only sub-standard online modes setting it apart from the rest. That's not enough to give the game the kickstart it needs and, as a result, it crawls over the finish line in last place.

VERDICT 3/10
UNCONVINCING, IRRITATING AND SLOW



Your passenger (or "playa") sits on top of the car seat to shoot his gun (or "gat") at other riders (or "ridas")

XBOX £29.99



The Xbox game suffers from the same problems with the unsatisfactory handling, dull missions and loathsome attempts at nailing the ghetto vibe by littering dialogue with "gangsta" and "playa". Xbox Live means going online is painless but even that can't save the game once you're actually racing.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
ROLLING THUNDER: *187 Ride Or Die* allows you to play the multiplayer options online against five other racers. A cute option but one that doesn't manage to escape the game's failings.



Unfortunately, hanging out of the sunroof is obligatory. Where's a low bridge when you need one, eh?



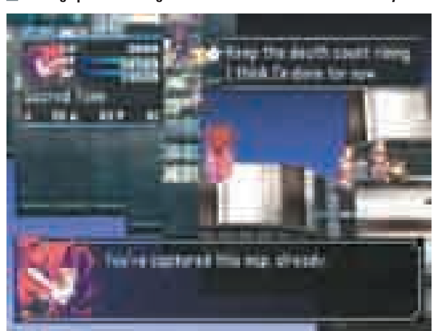
Apart from making your eyes hurt, the motion blur almost convinces you the racing is fast and furious. Almost.

■ The first time you find one of these little tanks, you might actually cry with joy. We did. Then we stole the tank and punished everyone. Awesome.





■ Picking up and throwing items is an essential skill to master early.



MAKAI KINGDOM: CHRONICLES OF THE SACRED TOME

EVERYTHING COUNTS IN LARGE AMOUNTS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nippon Ichi

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
Q1 '06 (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

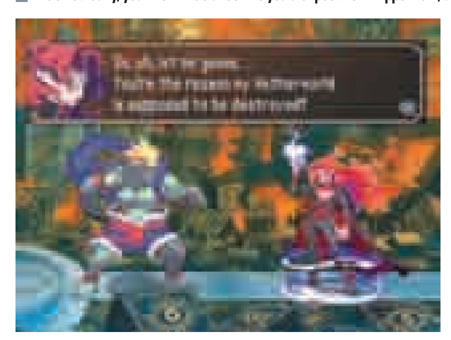
We're pretty confident that when this little old game called life draws to a close, we'll not be queuing at the Pearly Gates. No, after years of laughing at things that we know are oh-so-wrong and enjoying the kind of simulated violence that has made Rockstar filthy rich, it's pretty safe to say that Beelzebub has a devil put aside for us. But what's Hell really like? The traditional view of fire, brimstone and eternal torment, perhaps? Doesn't really sound much like a laugh. *Doom 3*'s take on Satan's pad isn't much better unless you're a fan of jumping between platforms over nothingness. And even thinking about Bill and Ted's trip to the underworld scares us silly. But despite what you might think, it's not all doom and gloom. Nippon Ichi paints a somewhat rosier picture of the many Netherworlds (nothing to do with the Netherlands, we're assured). Between the gallivanting Prinnies, constant resurrections and wonderfully quirky humour, Hell has never looked quite this inviting.

In a nutshell, *Makai Kingdom* is pretty much exactly what you'd get if you put *Disgaea* and *Phantom Brave* in a blender. (That's not strictly true – that would just render £80 worth of awesome games unplayably scratched, but you get the point.) The best parts of each game clash to create some kind of super-strategy RPG, so while movement about the stages may be free from the trappings of grids, many other aspects such as character trees and battle rewards come straight from *Disgaea* (arguably) Nippon Ichi's most acclaimed title to date. But rather than surpassing *Disgaea* or even replacing it, the differing mechanics allow *Makai* to co-exist with these greats, and while it may not have the benefit of being the originator of much of its content, *Makai* can claim – with some conviction – to be the most user-friendly, concise and entertaining strategy RPG in years.

While *Disgaea* allowed character levels to climb higher than most of the country can count, *Makai Kingdom* brings the cap down to a still-ridiculous 2,000. Considering you can 'finish' the game with double-figure levels that's a hell of a lot of extra play but the content is there to support it. Even a good number of the main story missions are randomly generated, and with the potential to create as many Free Dungeons as you like (Mana permitting) there's no shortage of things to do and people to punish. For the real rewards, you'll need to keep your wits about you and look out for the Extensions – hidden areas of maps that can be



He's not really, you know. He's a fool. As you'd expect from Nippon Ichi, dialogue is beautifully written and, for the most part, just as well delivered.





revealed either by destroying 'key' items or tossing objects into the void that surrounds the battlegrounds. Usually, this is where the cool kids hang out with their rare goodies – make sure you take a thief along if you want to permanently borrow this equipment before doing away with its previous owner.

As a successor to *Phantom Brave*, a lot of elements are carried over into *Makai Kingdom* but these reappear in altered forms. Confining Spirit is now a simpler, one-shot deal that's performed from the hub area, creating permanent warriors that can be dropped into any scenario without worrying about time limits and suchlike. It won't just be units heading into battle, either – buildings can be invited to the battlefield for varying effects, offering bonuses to those who use the facilities, and vehicles from buggies to mech suits can be dropped off and abused at will. Knowing and acting on the properties of these new 'units' is a key to victory, and with a points-based system determining when you can leave a stage, tactics are more important than ever. There are so many possibilities offered by the combinations of abilities, weapons, classes and options that even though some levels are designed with set solutions in mind, a little skill and lateral thinking can open the door to far more lucrative and interesting ways of clearing missions.

Makai Kingdom is a staggering achievement. Just when you think you've seen it all, something else pops up and you find yourself pumping another inordinate amount of time into levelling up. Sleeping is for people who don't have *Makai Kingdom*. Those of us who do will need to get used to countless late nights caused by time sneakily speeding up while you're distracted by the colourful onscreen action. And if nothing else, it's got an irritable part-camp demon, part-fallen angel, part-dragon character called Dark Lord Valvoga. If you haven't already embraced Nippon Ichi's latest as something you need to play, then either you're a bad person, you hate yourself or you're just a good old-fashioned buffoon. It really is that simple. Now stop reading. That Prinny army won't assemble itself, you know…



GLORIOUS – NIPPON ICHI DOES IT AGAIN

games™ ENHANCED

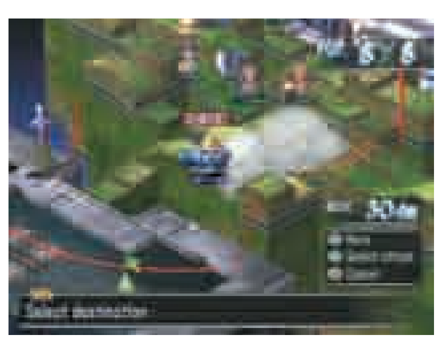
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

HOME SWEET HOME: Take buildings into battle to resupply or power up on the fly.

PIMP MY RIDE: Why storm enemy forces on foot when you can mount an uber-powerful mech suit?

HELL TO PAY

Sacrificing one's life for the greater good is a noble end indeed, but in *Makai Kingdom* death doesn't necessarily have to be the be-all and end-all. Even though spending accrued Mana on wishes, facilities and dungeons can have ever-so-slightly fatal side effects, units lost in this manner can be brought back from the beyond in entirely new bodies. Any skills they once knew are carried over, and with stat bonuses added with each resurrection it can be a good thing to kill off your prized warriors from time to time. This makes it easy to simply upgrade a character's class, create a hard-as-nails magician or grant any unit type curative magic among many other options – reincarnation is a wonderful tool to have at your disposal when making your squad very much your own. Go on. Just try to resist the lure of making them all Prinnies…



Tearing up the map in a vehicle is a worrying amount of fun in its own right. You may lose days just whirling around in a tank…

PHANTOM BRAVE



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS

FAQs

Q. IS IT GRID-BASED?
No. Like in *Phantom Brave*, movement is based on distance you can travel.

Q. COMPLEX?
It might seem that way, but not especially. In fact, *Makai Kingdom* is probably Nippon Ichi's most accessible title yet.

Q. ARE THERE PRINNIES?
Maybe. Let's just say they're not available from the start, dood.

NANOSTRAY

SHIN'EN'S FIRST DS TITLE STRAYS OFF TARGET

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Germany

PUBLISHER
Majesco

DEVELOPER
Shin'en

PRICE
$35.99

RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

Shin'en has already taken two stabs at the shoot-'em-up genre, and while the *Iridion* games were technically impressive, gameplay in both was severely lacking. Fortunately, *Nanostray*, while far from perfect, is a real leap forward for the developer. Considering the amount of 2D titles that have appeared on Nintendo's handheld it's nice to see that the DS is no slouch at pushing polygons. Everything zips along incredibly fast with slowdown only appearing when opponents fill the screen, and Shin'en has also paid homage to previous shooters so fans will easily spot references to titles such as *Ikaruga*, *Darius* and *Axelay*. Add a typical shooter soundtrack – all techno riffs and boisterous spot effects – and the resulting game is an aesthetic delight.

But for all the visual splendour *Nanostray*'s gameplay mechanics are rather drab. While there are only four weapons to choose from, more powerful versions of them can be accessed by pressing the B button (albeit at the expense of an ever-decreasing power bar). Sadly, the weapon selection is restricted to the touch screen and is extremely cumbersome. Factor in a superfluous radar that allows you to scan for enemy weaknesses and you have yet another title that criminally wastes the DS's second screen. Invisible barriers on either side of the screen are also a problem and constrict an already tight play.

Luckily, your ship can take a number of hits although a full-on collision will always result in immediate death.

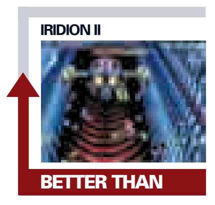
Nanostray's saving grace is its solid scoring system, but even this isn't spot-on. Destroy a wave of enemies and you'll be rewarded with coins; gold ones boost your score, blue coins revitalise your power bar, and providing you don't use your secondary weapon your score multiplier will net you huge amounts of points. However, it's all too easy to shoot enemies before they appear on screen so you'll miss out on their precious coins. It's a massive oversight and cripples an otherwise flawless system.

Luckily, there are no such problems with the multiplayer mode, which offers a series of decent Wi-Fi challenges via one DS cart. While the available modes – Time Attack, Bonus Race and first to 25,000 points – are simple head-to-head affairs they do provide some intense competition (although the flaws from the main game still remain). There's no doubt that *Nanostray* is a remarkable-looking game, but Shin'en still can't nail that all-important gameplay.



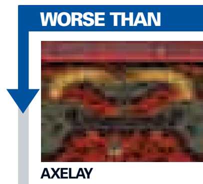
VERDICT 6/10
SOLID ENOUGH BUT POORLY EXECUTED

IRIDION II

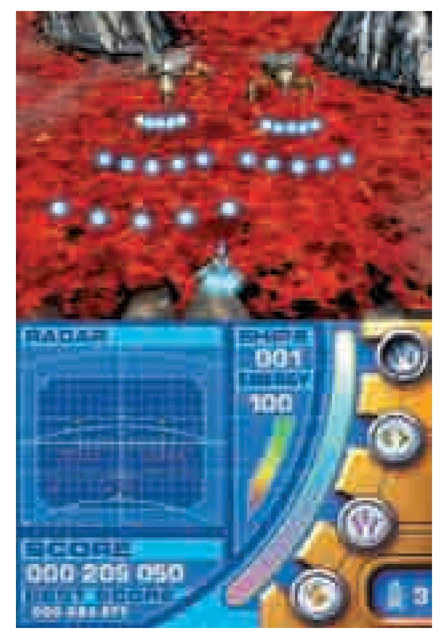


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



AXELAY



Thankfully, the hit box is incredibly well defined and allows you to dodge bullets like a pro… especially if you *are* a pro.



Things get pretty frantic even in the early stages, so careful management of your special attacks is required from the start.



Taking out complete waves of enemies is the key to getting blue coins, and they'll keep your power bar nice and healthy.



Injuries can now occur without fouls – watching a player pull up with a hamstring strain is very realistic.



Yes, yes, so we know it all looks the same as it did before. But it's not. Really, it's not. Try it for yourself if you don't believe us.



Roberto Carlos' free kicks are more potent than ever. It's easily possible to evoke memories of *that* goal in Le Tournoi.

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IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

JAW ON FLOOR: The new animations are absolutely incredible – especially the new volleys.

COME ON, THEN!: The tussles between defenders and attackers are astonishingly realistic.

THE BEST JUST GOT SO MUCH BETTER

WINNING ELEVEN 9

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
KCET

PRICE
¥7,225

RELEASE
N/A (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-8

P*ro Evolution Soccer 4* was broken. Goalies who stood still when the ball was creeping inside the net, random fouls, players that kicked nowhere near the ball during replays – the game caused more frustration than pleasure. That didn't stop us notching up hundreds of hours in multiplayer, but screaming at the screen every few seconds is not the reaction this series should elicit.

Thank the Lord, then, that *Winning Eleven 9* is wonderful. The most immediate difference is the new-found solidity of the players. The first five minutes of play feel stiff, but the moment Rooney shrugs off two markers and powers towards goal is the first time the game has felt genuinely different in the last few years. Player control is infinitely tighter – fast, skilful players are blessed with countless new animations for dazzling defenders, whereas ball winners like Viera visibly hound opponents, pulling shirts, nudging and shoulder barging. It's a joy to behold. Passing is far more fluid – crisp one-touch distribution feels even more intuitive but accuracy, timing and momentum must be taken into consideration or you'll see easy balls going astray. Long passes are flatter and faster, making them a far more useful attacking tool, and lobbed through-balls can be bent around the back line for the charging striker.

There are still a few niggles, however. At first, the referees seem incredibly harsh, blowing up for every minor, and seemingly unavoidable, infringement. Only after extended play does it become clear that charging around with the X button held down is just not possible any more – tackling demands far tighter timing and accuracy. Goalies, although mercifully no longer seen standing still like confused zombies, are still prone to some howlers, occasionally missing straight shots or spilling the ball into their own net.

So, it's still not quite perfect but it's getting very close. The gameplay feels so much more organic this time and the amount of detail that has gone into individual players is astounding. Every 'big name' footballer plays exactly how they do in real life – bamboozling a human opponent with Ronaldinho's 'flip flap' trick (yes, they've finally put it in) before delivering an inch-perfect cross for Kaka to spectacularly volley home has never looked, sounded or felt so good. No more burning rage, then; the next hundred hours of multiplayer will be so much sweeter.

VERDICT 9/10

SO, SO GOOD. CAN PRO EVO 5 POSSIBLY BETTER IT?



JUMP SUPERSTARS

"YOU GOTTA JUMP, MIGHT AS WELL JUMP"

DETAILS




FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Ganbarion

PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

Whether you like manga or not, chances are you're familiar with the *Shonen Jump* comics and graphic novels. Ever heard of *Yu-Gi-Oh!*? *Dragon Ball Z*? *Shaman King*? All *Shonen Jump*. But you don't know the half of it. From familiar titles such as *Naruto*, *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* and *Yu Yu Hakusho* to those that will be pretty much unknown to most Westerners – *Prince Of Tennis*, *Steel Ball Run* and *Bobobo-Bo Bo-Bobo* (no, really) – the *Shonen Jump* universe is huge, and, it would appear, all contained within *Jump Superstars*.

Spread over 150 characters from 27 series, *Jump Superstars'* line-up is encyclopaedic but, thankfully, its concept is simpler. Placed within one of a number of platform-based stages (all mocked up to look like pages from the manga they represent), up to four players can duke it out to beat each other into paste… and that's about it. Obviously, there are other factors – power-up-filled barrels and chests that can be smashed, the ability to 'rip' the walls of each arena and toss your opponents through them, the impressively simple and yet intricate system of move strings, character tiering and ultimate tag-team attacks and combos – but it's essentially just high-speed brawling fun that's as good as, if not slightly better and more frantic than what *Super Smash Brothers Melee* had to offer.

The twist, however, is in how the touch screen is used during character selection. Extending the comic-book styling even further, the bottom screen becomes a grid that you literally place your characters onto – the more powerful a character, the more space it takes up. That you can have any mixture of battle-ready characters, Support fighters (one-shot characters that be called upon much like the Strikers in *King Of Fighters*) and single-block helpers increases the possibilities further, especially since specific placements on the grid can increase the power of your characters, create tag-team attack opportunities and more besides. Even better, activating Support or switching between playable fighters (if you have more than one in your deck) is simply a matter of pressing the touch screen. It's an obvious use, but one that works wonders in the heat of battle.

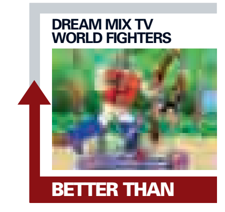
While the game may look simple, it really isn't once you start digging into the combat system, mission-based single-player game and methods of unlocking the many characters; indeed, it's only the heavy reliance on Japanese text and an ignorance of the various characters that might put you off. But you shouldn't let something that obvious put you off, particularly when there's something so solid and rewarding underneath.

CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
STRONGEST LINK: Wi-Fi single-cart multiplayer offers a random set of characters.
SWAP SHOP: Missing crucial character cards? Swap wirelessly with friends to complete the set.



VERDICT 7/10
A RESPECTABLE FIGHTER, ALBEIT A SLIGHTLY NICHE ONE

DREAM MIX TV WORLD FIGHTERS



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



SUPER SMASH BROTHERS MELEE



Adventurous types will experiment with characters they don't recognise, but familiar faces are good too.



Co-op moves are ridiculously powerful although they require the right mix of characters and plenty of space in your deck.




You can use Support characters to get you out of a tight spot, but don't forget that they're a limited resource.



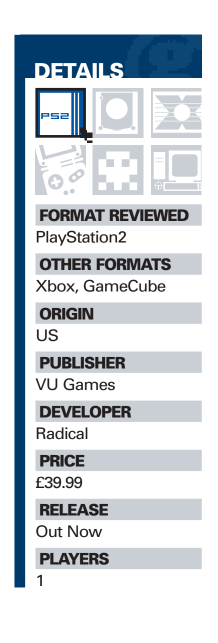
Meet Abomination, voiced by the always excellent Ron Perlman.

It's Devil Hulk. He's very, very big. You may want to hide.

Mechs are a mainstay of *Hulk's* universe – and this one's pretty tasty.

TWICE AS ANGRY AS MICHAEL MOORE AND ALMOST AS FAT

THE INCREDIBLE HULK: ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
VU Games

DEVELOPER
Radical

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

It all started with *Spider-Man 2*. Finally, a developer (in this case Treyarch) demonstrated an obvious understanding of the subject matter and created a game that was entirely about the hero in question – Spidey was the star and, at times, playing as him was a joy. *Ultimate Destruction* is very similar to the second Spider-Man outing. It's set in a free-roaming, '*GTA*' environment, complete with myriad side missions; it has a narrative that can be re-joined at the player's leisure; but most importantly, it nails the essence of being the Hulk to a tee, at least, until the initial wow factor wears off.

Anyone who doesn't get a kick out of hurling a bus into an airborne helicopter and watching the two explode in a fiery ball of twisted metal is lying to themselves. This is exactly how *Hulk* starts out. After a swift training level the game drops you into the city, which is a veritable sea of possibility. Almost everything can be destroyed – cars, people, tanks, planes, small buildings – and the effect is, admittedly, awesome. Everything explodes with the kind of pyrotechnic display normally reserved for Superbowl half-time shows and, when mixed with some excellently integrated DualShock rumbling and classy physics, the destruction is immensely satisfying. What's more, Hulk himself is now able to leap hundreds of feet in the air, bounding across the city with ease, leaving huge craters in the road wherever he lands.

The first few hours of the game continue in this vein, watching Hulk tear cars in half to use them as boxing gloves, or soaring high into the air, truck in hand, to deliver the kind of slam dunk Shaquille O'Neal could only dream of. However, this is also when the game's faults rear their heads. The camera is fundamentally broken, seemingly constantly wrestling with the auto-targeting system, creating a distressingly dizzying experience. And the gameplay is very repetitive; as much fun as the first city-wide battle with a flying mech is, such action loses its appeal on the sixth or seventh occurrence. Furthermore, despite Hulk having an incredible arsenal of unlockable moves, it's too easy to beat the majority of the game's bosses by using the 'slam dunk' technique – by the time the last few bosses turn up the game has run out of ideas. Hulk fans should get about 12 hours of fun out of this, but on the whole it's quite a hollow shell of a game.

VERDICT 5/10
FUN TITLE LET DOWN BY A DESCENT INTO GENERIC HELL

HULK

BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



SPIDER-MAN 2

SONY'S HANDHELD IS FINALLY ON BRITISH SHORES, BUT HAS IT BEEN WORTH THE WAIT?



Sleek, shiny, elegant… Sony's long-awaited PlayStation Portable is a thing of beauty. And now you can walk into a UK game store and simply pick one off the shelf. Simple. Or is it? On one hand, the PSP is a powerhouse; on the other, £180 is a lot of money for a handheld. That it can also play music and movies is a massive plus, until you factor in the cost of the memory stick you'll need to store them on. And the games may be closer to their console counterparts than they've ever been – but for £34.99 each? Of course, you'll have already decided if you want a PSP or not. But with that battle won (or lost, depending on how your wallet feels), you'll want some games to play. So here's a broad guide to the titles available in the PSP's first few weeks – and there's more than enough to keep you going.

PORTABLE PLEASURES

PUBLISHER SCEE DEVELOPER In-House ORIGIN Japan
GENRE Party PLAYERS 1-4 ONLINE No

MONKEYING AROUND

APE ACADEMY

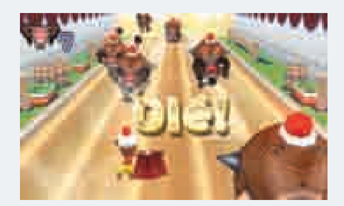
You'll already know if the concept of balancing a troop of monkeys on top of each other and tip-toeing through a canyon appeals to you; it certainly does to us. Even so, *Ape Academy* is a flawed gem – a laughter-fuelled blast through some incredibly inventive mini-games let down by repetition, frustration and some rather lengthy loading times.

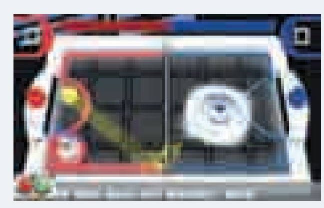
The main body of the game is a noughts and crosses-based mini-game test, where each block on the grid represents a game – players fight for their mark in order to get a line and win the level. Simple. Unfortunately, the games repeat throughout the levels and some of them are reasonably long, and the game suffers because of it. It lacks the immediacy of the *WarioWare* games, for example, and can never quite live up to the manic pleasures it initially promises.

But what about the games themselves? Protecting a giant banana from a horde of encroaching zombie monkeys? Interstellar laser-powered rock/paper/scissors battles? Monkey kung fu? Juggling? Bullfighting? They're all here and almost every game is a joy; the first time playing each one is a thoroughly delightful experience.

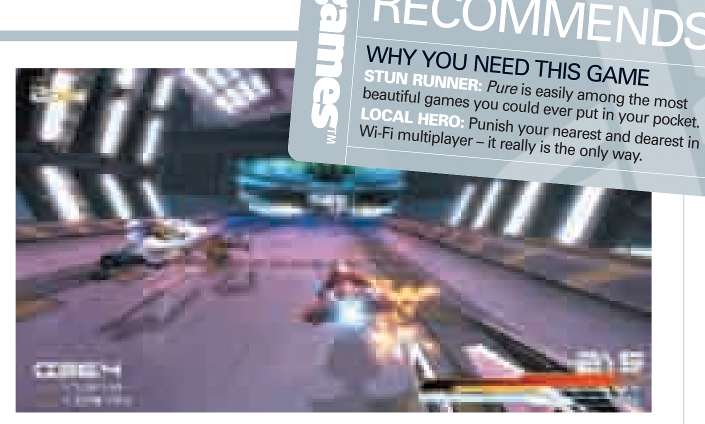
Multiplayer is also enjoyable, especially the many games that allow more than one player to use a single PSP. With four eager simian enthusiasts hunched over the machine, fingers primed to get the best start in the magnificent one metre sprint, the game becomes an ultra-tense battle of nerves and will – amazing considering the fact that it's a bunch of tiny monkeys having a little race.

Certainly, *Ape Academy* should be of interest to anyone after some unadulterated fun to balance out the overtly 'this gen' thrills of *WipEout Pure* or *Ridge Racer*. As a single-player title *Academy* may get tiresome quickly, but its multiplayer modes will remain crucial long into the winter months.









games™ RECOMMENDS

WHY YOU NEED THIS GAME

STUN RUNNER: *Pure* is easily among the most beautiful games you could ever put in your pocket.
LOCAL HERO: Punish your nearest and dearest in Wi-Fi multiplayer – it really is the only way.

PUBLISHER SCEE DEVELOPER In-House ORIGIN UK
GENRE Racing PLAYERS 1 (2-6 WLAN) ONLINE Downloadable Content

WIPEOUT PURE

FEELING THE NEED FOR PORTABLE SPEED

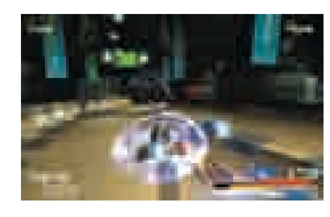
Sony isn't stupid, you know. With the original *WipEout* still lauded as one of the highlights of the original PlayStation's launch even ten years on, there was never really any doubt that this sci-fi racer would arrive in a similarly timely fashion for the PSP's release. And oh, how Psygnosis' baby has grown in the last decade – shinier, faster and more refined than ever before, *WipEout* tears onto the PSP and manages to make most other racers feel horribly out of date.

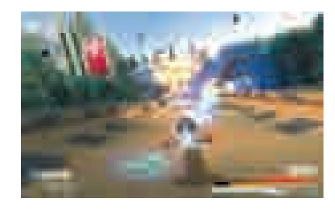
If there's a single game right now that showcases the potential of Sony's handheld, it can be nothing other than *WipEout Pure*. Stunningly presented and even more impressive once the racing begins this zips along like a duck with a motor, and despite a little frame rate fluctuation here and there, *Pure* is never anything less than breathtaking.

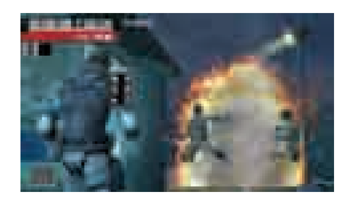
New weapon mechanics work well – absorbing weapons to regain shield power or using them normally to blast the competition – meaning there are no pit lanes any more and bullying opponents into submission is now an enjoyably sadistic option.

The control issues that blight several early PSP titles really aren't present here either. With shoulder buttons as air brakes, the face buttons for all other functions and your choice of digital or analogue control, you'll get the hang of gliding around even the toughest of corners in no time.

You could possibly grumble about the limited number of tracks on the UMD but even that isn't an oversight. Using the Wi-Fi online options (or the regular internet if you prefer) you'll be able to download a selection of new courses, skins and vehicles to give the game that much more longevity as the months roll on. Even without this extra content, *WipEout Pure* is an undeniable star of the PSP launch. Just don't expect your eyes to make it through the ordeal in one piece…










PUBLISHER Konami **DEVELOPER** In-House **ORIGIN** Japan
GENRE Action Strategy **PLAYERS** 1 **ONLINE** No

FOR CARD-CARRYING OPERATIVES

METAL GEAR AC!D



Let's get this straight right from the off – *Metal Gear Ac!d* isn't for everyone. Stealth action is a limiter in itself (surprisingly, we know plenty of people who hate games like *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell*), but throwing in the complexity of card-based strategy really pushes things over the edge. However, in doing so Konami has also managed to create one of the most interesting and unique games on the PSP so far; a title that really stands out from the crowd of obvious racing, sports and shooting titles.

Essentially, *Ac!d* is a strategy game first and everything else second – every single action Snake performs is dictated by the various cards you hold in your deck. Want to attack an enemy? Whip out one of your many weapon cards and blow him away. Need to clear an obstruction? Then brandishing the C4 card is the order of the day. Even movement requires cards, although getting around requires the sacrifice of other cards rather than the use of specific movement ones. It sounds complicated, but it really isn't; however, even the familiar characters and visual style can't hide the fact that it's as far away from the usual action in *Metal Gear* as you can possibly get.

Not that this is a bad thing, of course. It's just that those approaching *Ac!d* from the likes of *Snake Eater* or *Sons Of Liberty* might be in for a rude awakening.

For people knowing what the game will get them into, however, it couldn't be more perfect – the familiar *Metal Gear* story-telling and cut-scene-driven action (which, as always, make little sense for much of the time) combined with a strategic element reminiscent of *Might & Magic* works strangely well. While it probably won't be the most popular PSP game around, *Metal Gear Ac!d* is certainly one of the most ambitious; hopefully a good sign for the future of the handheld.





PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Namco **ORIGIN** Japan
GENRE Racing **PLAYERS** 1 (2-6 WLAN) **ONLINE** No

RIDGE RACER

"YOU'RE ONE HECK OF A DRIVER… YOU'VE GOTTA TEACH ME!"

If *Ridge Racer* had been released on home consoles, there's a good chance it would have been ignored – bullied into a corner by *Burnout* and given a good kicking by *Need For Speed*. However, launching it as a showcase for the power of Sony's PSP is a masterstroke, and the game is all the better for it.

Namco has created *Ridge Racer* as a 'best of' compilation for one its most loved series, but those expecting more of the same will be in for a few surprises. First off, Namco has altered play mechanics in such a way as to make the new game feel unique. With a little nod to *Burnout* it's now possible to build up a Nitrous with skilful driving, which adds genuine strategy to each race – silently goading your immediate opponent into wasting his nitro when you still have one in the tank echoes the opening race of *The Fast And The Furious*.

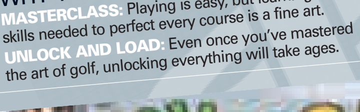
The real meat of the *Ridge Racer* driving experience announces itself on the first corner. Overtaking at right angles, turning the wrong way into a corner in order to pirouette through it, strafing through a chicane… all possible with graceful manipulation of the PSP's lovely analogue 'nub'. The rush of sliding all the way around a huge hairpin, overtaking three cars in the process, then smashing your Nitrous to the call of 'CRITICAL HIT!' from the joyfully over-enthusiastic announcer, cannot be paralleled.

As lovely as *Ridge* is, however, it's not a faultless experience. The game, although focused, is also limited and can become very repetitive after extended play. As a shiny new game to show off your shiny new toy, though, you could do a lot worse, especially if you can find seven other people with whom you can Wi-Fi it up.

games™ RECOMMENDS

WHY YOU NEED THIS GAME

MMM, SHINY: Undoubtedly, *Ridge Racer's* visuals are a perfect way to show off your new PSP.
BOOST GET: Tactical use of the Nitrous adds a layer of strategy to an already excellent game.



WHY YOU NEED THIS GAME

MASTERCLASS: Playing is easy, but learning the skills needed to perfect every course is a fine art.

UNLOCK AND LOAD: Even once you've mastered the art of golf, unlocking everything will take ages.



PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Clap Hanz **ORIGIN** Japan
GENRE Sports **PLAYERS** 1 (2-8 WLAN) **ONLINE** No

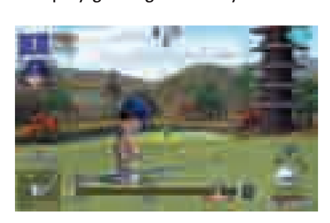
EVERYBODY'S GOLF

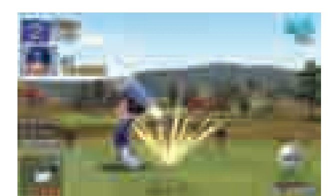
A STRONG DRIVE DOWN THE FAIRWAY FOR SONY

R*idge Racer* has its high-speed thrills, *Lumines* offers its brain-burning puzzles, so how is it that out of all the PSP's Japanese launch titles it's a few rounds of golf that have kept us playing the most through to the machine's launch in the UK? Sure, it's the simplest things that often provide the most pleasure, but when those pleasures are also as playable and fun as *Everybody's Golf*… well, it makes it all the easier to understand.

That *Everybody's Golf* follows the previous titles in the series (under the *Hot Shots* moniker) pretty closely gives the game a good foundation to build upon, mainly because the cut-down approach to the sport translates well to the portable screen. Naturally, the cartoon-style visuals wear their charm very much on their sleeve compared to upcoming titles like *Tiger Woods*, but it's the focus on arcade action as opposed to the more realistic approach that really helps the game shine. It's pick-up-and-play gaming at its very best with controls that you can get the hang of within minutes, although the subtle tweaks, power shots and special spins that are hidden underneath mean there are plenty of opportunities to become a genuine golfing master.

As is the norm for *Hot Shots Golf* games, unlocking is the key component of the single-player mode, with a whole stock of characters, courses and customisable equipment waiting to be won as you improve the skills of your chosen golfer. Other side modes, such as the putting competition, help to keep the action diverse enough to be interesting, but the Wi-Fi multiplayer is where your attention should be directed – golf with friends is always better than golf alone, so it's not surprising that *Everybody's Golf*'s offering is a huge amount of fun. In fact, it's hard to fault the game at all; not even usual faults like loading or control issues get in the way, so to suggest that this is anything other than a must-have PSP title would be foolish.





PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** In-House **ORIGIN** UK
GENRE Action Shooter **PLAYERS** 1 (2-8 WLAN) **ONLINE** No

A MIXED BAG OF BULLETS AND BLANKS

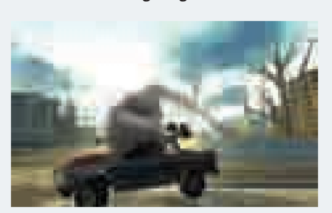
FIRED UP

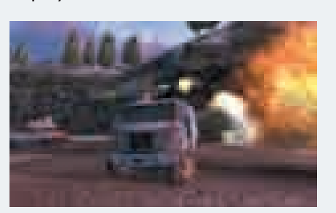
'Free-roaming' is fast becoming the bane of the discerning gamer. Every developer seems incessant on trying to replicate that famous 'sandbox' environment, mimicking the structure of challenge-based missions, random tokens to collect and an entire map within which you are free to, yes, roam. However, *Grand Theft Auto*'s sandbox was vibrant and filled with colour, personality and humour; *Fired Up*'s consists of empty roads, grey buildings and banality.

For a game based on the premise of driving all manner of tooled-up vehicular powerhouses in order to blow up many things, it's crushingly dull. Replaying the same missions that have plagued a thousand *GTA* clones – smash road blocks, chase and kill a car, collect things – but without being able to step outside your vehicle is not much fun.

It's a shame, because *Fired Up* does have a lot going for it. Aside from its blandness, the game looks great: shiny cars, ultra-smooth frame rate, terrific explosions… although these matter not when the game is so tiresome. The physics engine is also worthy of note, with cars and tanks being tossed around by ferocious fireballs, bouncing dramatically and accurately off walls and the tarmac.

The game's saving graces are its multiplayer options, allowing game sharing so any owner of the game can play with up to seven people by sharing the multiplayer maps with them. And the multiplayer is fun, if limited. It's undoubtedly satisfying to send a perfectly aimed missile at your friend's tank and watch it soar skywards. Equally, it's frustrating to be peppered with machine-gun fire and have no idea it's happening until you blow up. But game sharing must be encouraged, and it's implemented in *Fired Up* very well. It's just a shame that the game is more of a chore than a pleasure to play.











PUBLISHER Ubisoft
DEVELOPER Q Entertainment
ORIGIN Japan
GENRE Puzzle **PLAYERS** 1-2
ONLINE No

games™ RECOMMENDS

WHY YOU NEED THIS GAME

TRANSCENDENTAL: A *Lumines* session is hugely relaxing despite the puzzle-based approach.
ADDICITVE: Is *Lumines* the best block puzzler since *Tetris*? Possibly, although it's a close call.

WIRED FOR SIGHT AND SOUND

LUMINES

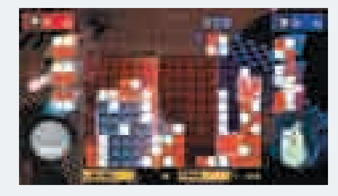


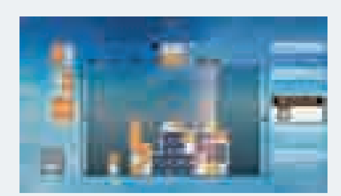
Auteur theory – usually the preserve of the cinema – can, in a few select cases, be applied to videogames. There aren't many games that can really be viewed as the true vision of one man, and perhaps Miyamoto, Ancel and Kojima could be considered videogame auteurs. However, the creator of *Rez* and *Space Channel 5*, Tetsuya Mizuguchi, is pushing the medium forward with his experimentation with light, sound and gameplay. His latest work, *Lumines*, is no different.

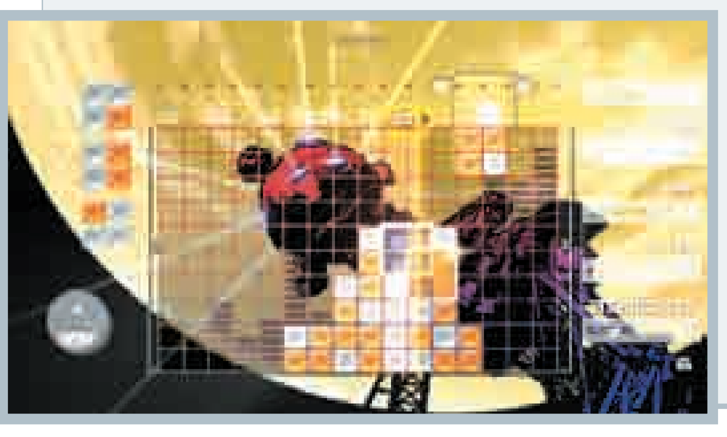
Essentially a falling-block puzzle game, *Lumines*' secret is in its simplicity. A cross between *Tetris* and *Columns*, the idea of the game is to build squares and rectangles of the same colour by manipulating the two-tone blocks that fall at regular intervals. Clear the screen by making squares and the other blocks will fall as gaps are created. Simple.

What sets *Lumines* apart, though, is its integration with music. The Challenge mode (the game's main focus) is split into 'skins' that change as higher scores are achieved. These skins bring new backgrounds, different-coloured blocks and, most importantly, a new tune to play along with. In a very similar way to *Rez*, everything comes together in time with the music, making for an almost transcendental experience. The light show and euphoric sound that accompany a large screen clearance are immensely satisfying, triggering those familiar *Rez* endorphins, leaving you feeling relaxed and strangely happy.

In many ways, *Lumines* is the antithesis of the DS's *Meteos*. Whereas *Meteos* is incredibly frantic and intense, *Lumines* is far more sedate and calming. However, this means that games can often carry on for up to or over an hour. A game of *Lumines* requires a hefty time investment and contradicts the PSP's ethos of short, satisfying gaming bursts. Still, it's a sublime game all PSP adopters should at least experience, and fans of Mizuguchi will embrace this title whole-heartedly.












PUBLISHER EA Sports BIG **DEVELOPER** EA Canada **ORIGIN** Canada
GENRE Sports **PLAYERS** 1 (2 WLAN) **ONLINE** No

NBA STREET SHOWDOWN

SLAMMIN' A DUNK, FO' SHIZZLE



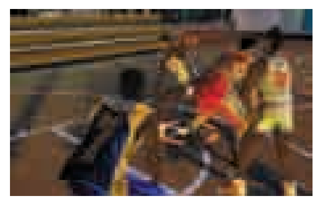
While this isn't exactly a direct port of EA's recent NBA console title, *NBA Street Showdown* owes a pretty big debt to the other games in the series. The overly enthusiastic commentary, the stylised music selection and, of course, the re-creation of street-based, three-on-three basketball action across a variety of courts. If it wasn't for some minor graphical sacrifices, you'd almost think it was the same game.

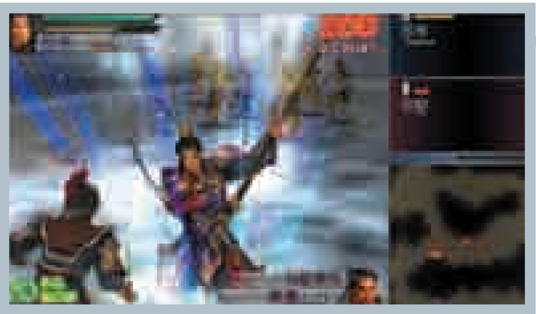
Thankfully, moving *NBA Street* to the PSP (and therefore having to cut down some elements) has actually done the game a world of good. The create-your-own GameBreakers that made playing *NBA Street V3* an unworkable chore, for instance, are now gone, replaced by the physics-defying moves we all enjoyed from the previous game. The Trick Move system has also been simplified to compensate for the loss of additional shoulder buttons, substituting either tapping or holding of particular buttons to perform more advanced moves. It works pretty well once you get to grips with it, even if it does feel pretty messy at first.

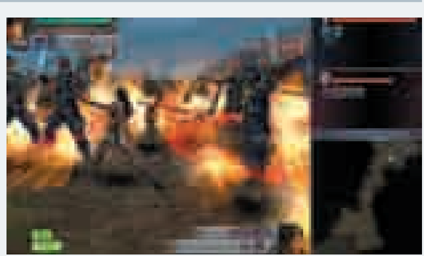
Single-player King Of The Courts mode sticks close to the *NBA Street* roots, offering a variety of challenges that you have to overcome in order to claim each court. Unfortunately, some of these challenges take the form of new mini-games such as Shot Blocker (which is annoying at best) and the boring Arcade Shoot-Out, making avoiding such disappointments totally impossible. Why EA chose to do this is confusing as these modes are easily the weakest part of the whole game; at one point, having to play Shot Blocker over and over (including the lengthy loading between losses) nearly made us give up altogether.

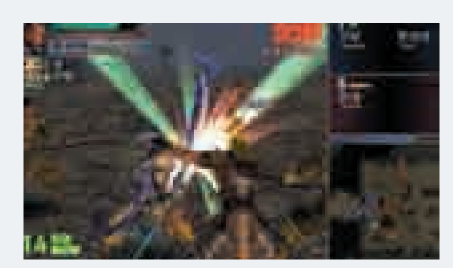
That said, *NBA Street Showdown*'s competency in replicating the action of its bigger brothers is at least worthy of some attention, if only to show that EA can get it right when it tries.











PUBLISHER Koei **DEVELOPER** In-House **ORIGIN** Japan
GENRE Beat-'Em-Up **PLAYERS** 1 **ONLINE** No

DYNASTY WARRIORS

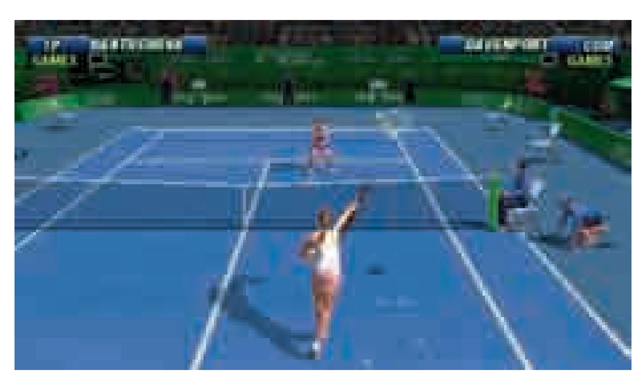
HACK, SLASH, STAB, PUNCH… AND RELAX

We appreciate that changes have to be made when moving familiar and hardware-intensive titles from console to handheld. That's fine. But when these changes detract from the fundamental selling point of a game, that's when we start making that screwed-up, confused, prune face that locals tend to make when you try out your 'slightly rusty' language skills abroad. Poor old *Dynasty Warriors*…

In order to facilitate the kind of quick-fix gaming for which portable consoles are often used, battlegrounds have been sliced into bite-sized chunks and each area populated accordingly. Unfortunately, this makes for some fairly sparse areas and those massive clashes – the highlight of the series for most players – are pretty much a thing of the past, replaced by fairly limited rumbles in plentiful supply. It's certainly different but it detracts from what makes the original games so exhilarating. It isn't hard to see why this has been done but that doesn't really soften the blow. For shame. Elsewhere, reports are good. Visually, even the fairly heavy fogging can't detract from the numerous and detailed models and solid animation. Even the structure itself is a great idea but with it comes the lack of scale that drags Koei's first PSP title down.

As a franchise, *Dynasty Warriors* takes a lot of flak from people who slam the games for being 'repetitive' and 'boring' but, in general, the series has been solid and entertaining, especially when the missions get more advanced after the first few hours. So while we'd urge players to delve deeper into the home versions to give them time to shine, *Dynasty Warriors* on the PSP is more an experiment gone slightly awry than a game that will hold your attention. Fun to a point, but seriously lacking.





PUBLISHER Sega **DEVELOPER** Sumo Digital **ORIGIN** UK
GENRE Sports **PLAYERS** 1 (2-4 WLAN) **ONLINE** No

SEGA TAKES IT IN STRAIGHT SETS

VIRTUA TENNIS: WORLD TOUR

***Virtua Tennis* is one of videogame-sport's crowning glories, finding the perfect balance between looks, action and realism, and blending them to create an immensely addictive and enjoyable tennis experience.** Give thanks, then, that Sega's prized sporting property arrives on PSP virtually unchanged.

The series' trademarks are all impressively intact: the fluid animation on the typically detailed character models looks lovely on the hi-res screen, and the first ten minutes of play will be spent in awe of Sumo Digital's technical achievement – *World Tour* looks and plays almost identically to *Virtua Tennis 2* on the PS2. Control via the PSP's analogue nub, although initially somewhat unwieldy, eventually becomes second nature, catering well for all manner of passing shots, lobs and 'slam dunk' smashes. The near faultless 'early button press equals stronger shot' mechanic is translated immaculately, meaning *Virtua Tennis* masters will have no trouble adapting to life on the handheld tour.

Unfortunately, the single-player options leave a little to be desired. Championship mode plays out exactly like the arcade versions, offering a series of opponents to best before the final championship match. World Tour mode is still a 'love it or hate it' affair, the mixture of mini-games and inaccurate tournaments is very much an acquired taste.

Multiplayer, however – supporting up to four players for doubles games – is awesome and the real reason to invest in World Tour. *Virtua Tennis* has always been about the multiplayer, and being able to play someone sitting on the other side of the room is one of PSP gaming's highlights thus far. In fact, given the limited nature of the single-player modes the multiplayer is crucial, so buyers beware: make sure a friend plans to invest as well or you could be left feeling like Henman – close, but unfulfilled.

SMART BOMB

WE CAN THINK OF AT LEAST ONE THING WRONG WITH THAT TITLE



PUBLISHER Eidos **DEVELOPER** Core Design **ORIGIN** UK **GENRE** Puzzle **PLAYERS** 1 (2-4 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



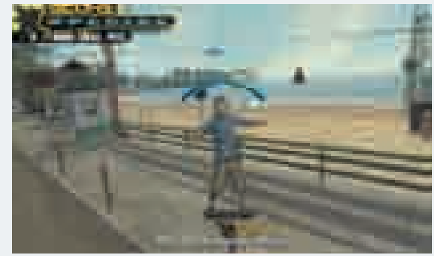
We're all for original puzzle games but sometimes the concept can be far better than the product. Unfortunately, that's the deal with *Smart Bomb*. The idea of solving a series of mini-games to defuse an explosive device is interesting enough but the activities themselves range from decent to terrible. Mess one up and you'll spend 15 minutes doing the same tasks again to get back to where you were. We'd recommend this as much as making a bomb joke next time you go through Customs.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2 REMIX

THE SAME AS IT EVER WAS… NEARLY



PUBLISHER Activision **DEVELOPER** Neversoft **ORIGIN** US **GENRE** Sports **PLAYERS** 1 (2-6 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



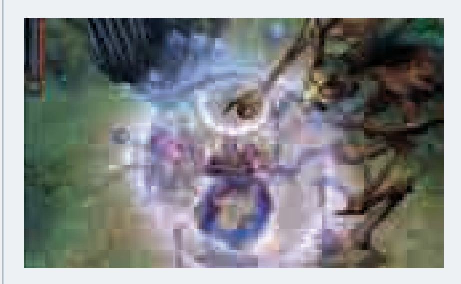
As any *Hawk* fan will tell you, playing on anything other than a DualShock 2 isn't going to get you in any high-score tables. Even though the basic layout is the same, it's the lack of buttons that stings the PSP version of the Birdman's latest jaunt – a lack of camera control and multi-purpose shoulder buttons makes the main objectives (let alone any kind of high-scoring combo) rather tricky to pull off. Sure, it's the same great game as before but even with the new content we'd take the home version over this.

UNTOLD LEGENDS: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL

A STORY THAT SHOULDN'T BE TOLD



PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Sony Online Entertainment **ORIGIN** US **GENRE** RPG **PLAYERS** 1 (2-4 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



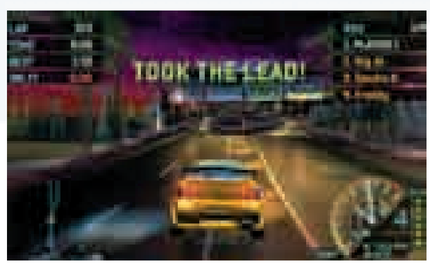
If hammering the hell out of your shiny new X button and sitting through epic loading times are your idea of a good time, pick up *Untold Legends* now – it's perfect for you. The frustrating thing is that *Brotherhood Of The Blade* is a perfectly sound game. Indeed, if it weren't for the silly loading times (and resultant battery drain) and the slightly cluttered control layout, we'd be putting a lot more time into this. Still, if you're after an RPG fix from day one, it's not like you have any other choice.

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND RIVALS

RIVALS? IT'S HARDLY EVEN A RUNNER-UP



PUBLISHER EA Games **DEVELOPER** EA Redwood Shores **ORIGIN** US **GENRE** Racing **PLAYERS** 1 (2-6 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



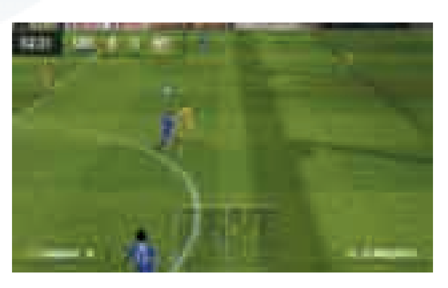
The *Underground* series has managed to dominate the charts every step of the way, and although *Rivals* is likely to ride along on its predecessors' success, it really has no right to be anywhere near the top slot. When compared to the racing experiences available in *WipEout Pure* and *Ridge Racer* this really can't compete, and from the mildly disappointing graphics through to the slowdown that sometimes appears when you achieve 'air', you can't help but feel that this could have been done much better.

WORLD TOUR SOCCER

WHERE'S PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER WHEN YOU NEED IT?



PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** In-House **ORIGIN** UK **GENRE** Sports **PLAYERS** 1 (2 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



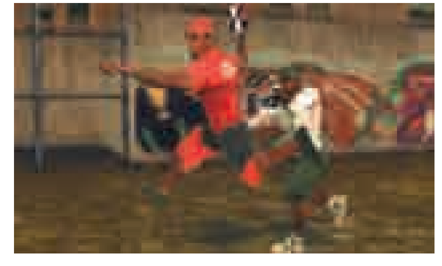
The first few moments are ominous – oddly animated players chasing a ball around with seemingly no idea what's happening. However, delve a little deeper and *World Tour Soccer* is tremendous fun. When the game flows, it's possible to string together some fantastic moves and the commentary is wonderfully over-enthusiastic. It's not *Pro Evo*, but it was never going to be. However, it's a capable and surprisingly good (if not amazing) substitute to fill the gap before Konami's mighty effort arrives.

NFL STREET 2 UNLEASHED

STREET VIOLENCE WITH BALLS



PUBLISHER EA Sports BIG **DEVELOPER** EA Canada **ORIGIN** Canada **GENRE** Sports **PLAYERS** 1 (2 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



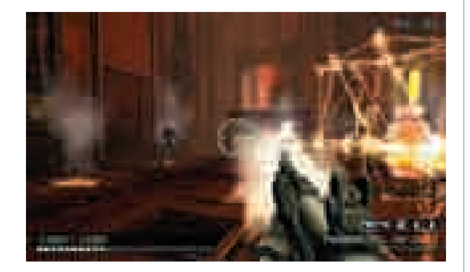
Any fan of the PS2 versions of *NFL Street* will be more than happy with EA Sports BIG's PSP conversion. Graphically, the game is a little sketchier than its console brother, but the fluidity of animation and impact of the hefty collisions is as satisfying as ever. As is becoming an EA trait, the loading times are intrusive, sometimes taking around 20 seconds to begin a match. However, they're not game-breaking and matches are long enough to compensate. A solid conversion of an enjoyable game.

CODED ARMS

FIRST THE WORST, SECOND THE BEST… ONLY THERE'S NO SECOND HERE



PUBLISHER Konami **DEVELOPER** In-House **ORIGIN** Japan **GENRE** FPS **PLAYERS** 1 (2-4 WLAN) **ONLINE** No





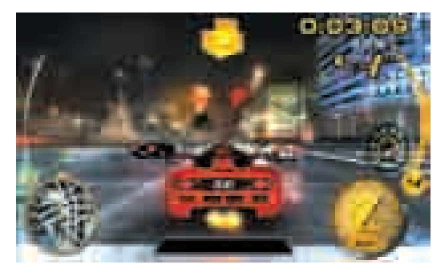
Konami at least deserves brownie points for being the first publisher to make a PSP FPS, and a damn pretty one at that. Unfortunately, such kudos can't mask *Coded Arms*' overly repetitive and simplistic gameplay (as we said in issue 35's review, even the original *Doom* is more sophisticated), and shaky controls don't help matters. Some people may be sucked in by how lovely it looks, but more fool them for falling for such tactics. There are better ways of spending your cash than on this mediocre effort.

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION

FAST RACING, SLOW LOADING



PUBLISHER Rockstar Games **DEVELOPER** Rockstar Leeds **ORIGIN** UK **GENRE** Racing **PLAYERS** 1 (2-6 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



Noticeably better looking than *NFSU Rivals*, if it's street racing and pimping you're after then this is by far the better option. All three maps from the console version have been squeezed in here so there's plenty of game to get through, but on the US version that we've played this has brought about some ridiculous loading times that are tough to tolerate. That said, it's been promised that the PAL version will be optimised and not feature a tea break between each race. Here's hoping…

DARKSTALKERS CHRONICLE: CHAOS TOWER

JOURNEY TO THE SECOND DIMENSION



PUBLISHER Capcom **DEVELOPER** In-House **ORIGIN** Japan **GENRE** Beat-'Em-Up **PLAYERS** 1 (2 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



Any game that combines monsters and fighting is okay by us. *Chaos Tower* is one such game, pulling together characters and settings from across the *Darkstalkers* series in a rather lovely fighting selection box. Unfortunately – and stop us if you've heard this one – the PSP isn't really up to the kind of button abuse required by a fighting game. True, it's good fun but the difficulty of taking your game to any half-decent level will see you drifting back to *Ridge Racer* in a couple of hours.

ARCHER MACLEAN'S MERCURY

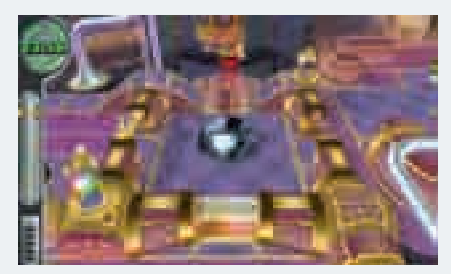
OPEN WIDE AND SAY 'ARGH'







PUBLISHER Atari **DEVELOPER** Awesome Studios **ORIGIN** UK **GENRE** Puzzle **PLAYERS** 1 (2 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



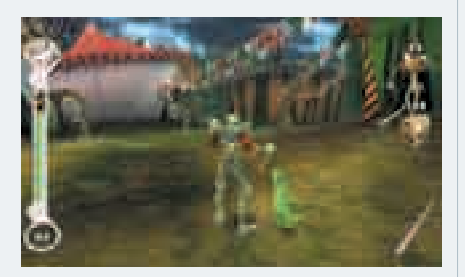
As simple a concept as it is (moving a blob of liquid metal from point to point), there's no getting away from the addictive and devious nature of *Mercury*. That it hides so many tiers of skills, allowing players to perfect their abilities to almost inhuman levels, is the real hook, although those with a low frustration threshold may find it a bit of a slog. Nevertheless, Archer Maclean's patented affinity for physics turns a potentially short-lived wonder into a work of art. Definitely one for the long haul.

MEDIEVIL RESURRECTION

SOME THINGS ARE BETTER LEFT DEAD



PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** In-House **ORIGIN** UK **GENRE** Adventure **PLAYERS** 1 **ONLINE** No



Third-person action games are going to struggle on the PSP – the lack of a second analogue stick feels counter-intuitive when moving throughout a game world, making third-person titles frustrating to play. Sony's remake of the original *MediEvil* suffers from this a great deal and its sub-*Zelda* lock-on system and choppy frame rate don't help. Ultimately, the is little more than the PSone original, and the 'find rune, use it on gate' mechanic at the game's core just feels outdated.

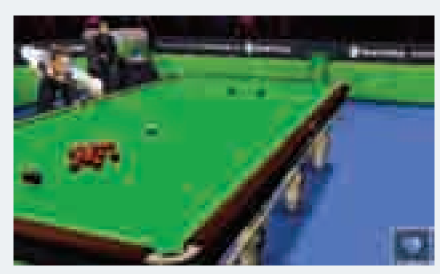
WORLD SNOOKER CHALLENGE

POT THE RED, THEN SCREW BACK





PUBLISHER Sega **DEVELOPER** Blade Interactive **ORIGIN** UK **GENRE** Sports **PLAYERS** 1 (2 WLAN) **ONLINE** No



Snooker – hardly the most exciting entry into the PSP race considering the competition. However, the fact that Blade has managed to take its original console title and squeeze it perfectly onto the PSP with no loss of detail or playability deserves a huge amount of respect. Sure, so it's probably not going to sell by the cartload but even so, *World Snooker Challenge* is technically excellent and offers solid physics, visuals and gameplay modes. It's just a shame all that effort has spent on a game that's so niche.



Feeling hot, hot, hot **Golden Axe – Arcade [Sega] 1989**


ITS 3


eMag



RETRO
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00p
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
ROBOTRON: 2084 – EUGENE JARVIS DISCUSSES HIS CLASSIC BLASTER
A BREED APART
We take a look back at Team 17's classic Alien Breed franchise
METAL SLUG
SIT BACK AND ENJOY ONE OF THE GREATEST BLASTERS EVER
ATARI 2600 – LEGENDARY!
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RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Thanks to the wonders of magazine deadlines, this month's editorial is about an event we're not covering until next month. Nevertheless, CGEUK '05 deserves a mention – if only to thank everyone involved for all the hard work that went in to it.

It may not have been the first retro event to have taken place in the UK, but there's no denying that Classic Gaming Expo UK is rapidly outgrowing its humble roots and is becoming a huge asset to the retro scene.

Sure, there have been plenty of nay-sayers who likened the recent Croydon show to nothing more than a glorified jumble sale (it wasn't, by the way) but they're missing the point entirely.

The likes of CGEUK, Retrovision and the upcoming Retro Ball aren't done for greed, but for a love of a subject that's close to many of our hearts (and, in the case of the Retro Ball, to raise money for the Everyman charity). Sure, a few traders cared for little more than making a profit, but the majority are avid gamers with a fountain of knowledge to draw upon.

Retro gaming remains a niche hobby and if miserable gamers are going to continue to want everything for nothing, then old-school pleasures will remain the preserve of the dedicated few.



Darran Jones, Retro Editor



TAITO TALKS

RETRO CHATS ABOUT SPACE INVADERS AND BUBBLE BOBBLE WITH THE GAMES' CREATORS

With retro compilation *Taito Legends* due very soon, we jumped at the chance to meet two of the company's most prestigious developers. Tomohiro Nishikado is responsible for classics such as *Space Invaders*, *Space Invaders Part II* and *Pop N Pop*, while Fukio Mitsuji has worked on *Bubble Bobble*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Volfied*.

games™: Did you ever expect *Space Invaders* to become such a success?
Tomohiro Nishikado: Well, I anticipated it would be a hit, but never thought it would be so huge. I was obviously delighted to see it become so popular but didn't get overwhelmed by it, as I was too busy working on my next project.

g™: How long did your games take to create?
TN: *Space Invaders* was about one year. While developing the game only took three or four months, developing the actual programming environment took a further six.
Fukio Mitsuji: I think mine took about six months. As I spent a considerable time creating the concept in the beginning, there was not much trouble in the development period.

g™: Where did you get the inspiration for your games?
FM: My original concept for *Bubble Bobble* was to create a game that was thrilling and exhilarating. Bubbles are an intuitive visual cue to convey a fun element and popping them all at once triggers thrills and exhilaration.
TN: *Space Invaders* was initially inspired by a popular game called *Block*. I was addicted to it and wanted to create a game that featured similar fun elements using a microcomputer. If you look at both titles there are many similarities; for instance, the invaders are placed in the same manner as the blocks, and the player must hit all targets in order to proceed to the next level. In *Block*, the ball is deflected to the player after hitting the blocks, but the invaders shoot at the player by themselves instead. I loved shooting games, so my goal was to create a computer-based shooting game.

g™: How hard was it coming up with new ideas for *Space Invaders Part II*?
TN: Easy really, as the new features in *Part II* had already been conceived at the time of *Space Invaders*. For instance, I wanted to include splitting invaders in the original *Space Invaders* but I had to omit it in order to meet a deadline. The sequel took me about two months to complete!

g™: What is your strongest memory of developing *Rainbow Islands*?
FM: In typical sequels, creators tend to employ the same gameplay with



▲ Cute ninjas? Well, we'd argue, but they've got weapons, so they can be as cute as they want.

Taito Legends

THE REVISED LIST

Sadly, it seems that several titles have gone missing from the *Taito Legends* line-up since we last reported on this excellent-looking compilation. While we're a bit upset that games such as *Ray Force* and *Darius Gaiden* are no longer going to be included, this is still shaping up to be an amazingly jam-packed disc. And it's not long until release day, either…

Bubble Bobble, Colony 7, The Electric Yo-Yo, Elevator Action, Exzisus, Gladiator, Great Swordsman, Jungle Hunt, The New Zealand Story, Operation Thunderbolt, Operation Wolf, Phoenix, Plotting, Plump Pop, Rainbow Islands, Rastan, Return Of The Invaders, Space Gun, Space Invaders, Space Invaders Part II, Super Qix, Tokio, Tube It, Volfied, Zoo Keeper



▲ There's no such thing as a dragon? Bub and Bob would probably beg to differ…

the same characters, but I was determined to create a totally different game from day one. To make this happen I had to come up with a fresh idea, which was very painful at times. The reason I chose to do this is because I felt falling into a rut is the worst enemy for a game.

g™: Whose idea was it to put previous Taito characters in *Pop N Pop*?
TN: Taito likes to feature characters from other games for cross-promotion purposes. I was requested to feature more Taito characters by the producer, although sadly, I wasn't involved in the actual character selection process.

g™: *Pop N Pop* shares many similarities with *Puzzle Bobble* – was this intentional?
TN: Definitely. Puzzle games were extremely popular at the time and *Puzzle Bobble* was one of the best, I chose to create a similar game.

g™: Which Taito games have you most enjoyed working on and why?
FM: I have special feelings for all the titles I was involved in. It was a very moving experience to see kids enjoying my games on the other side of the world. I am very glad that I chose this job.
TN: Personally, my most memorable of all times is a mechanical game called *Sky Fighter*, which was my first creation at Taito. Sadly, I don't think it actually exists any more. It was a shooting game that featured jet fighters, and because everything was mechanical I had to work hard to make the airplane movements look real. As for videogames, I have fond memories of a title called *Speed Race*, which may still exist somewhere. It was probably the first driving videogame ever made. Personally, I'm more proud of this title than *Space Invaders*.

g™: How do you feel about the current interest in retro games?
FM: It shows the players really appreciate good gameplay over sounds and visuals. I am very glad to see this happening.
TN: I think it's great. I prefer games that feature fun gameplay rather than pretty graphics and I want kids to play them too, as they're much easier to pick up and play.

A RETRO DAY OUT

A QUICK UPDATE ON THIS YEAR'S CGEUK

What a great day. Not only did we get to meet industry legends such as Matthew Smith and Walter Day (who had travelled all the way from America) we also got to greet many of our wonderful readers.

The **games™** stall proved so popular that we nearly didn't have any time to get any juicy coverage or



rummage through the many retro bargains that were available from the likes of Console Passion and Retro Trader. Sadly, this issue's deadline meant it was impossible to include the whole day's events this month, but rest assured that there will be full coverage of the show in issue 37.

Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events…

SEPTEMBER '05

Taito Legends
Date: TBA **Publisher:** Empire Interactive **Price:** TBC
Unlike the unlucky Japanese gamers, UK retro-heads are going to receive all sorts of Taito goodness when this fantastic retro collection hits the shelves. *Operation Wolf, The New Zealand Story, Elevator Action*, *Bubble Symphony*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Rastan* are just a few of the games to be included.

Jagfest '05
Date: Unconfirmed **Location:** Unconfirmed **Price:** Unconfirmed
Details are still sketchy at the moment, but we have been made aware that Jagfest UK will once again be returning. The event has been running for several years now and has slowly been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

Midway Arcade Treasures 3
Date: 30 September **Publisher:** Midway **Price:** TBC
Keen to try something new, Midway's third compilation has a racing theme and features the likes of *Hydro Thunder*, *S.T.U.N. Runner* and *Badlands*. The review's in this issue so check it out on page 150. How good is it? You're going to have to go and look.

Namco Museum 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Namco **Price:** TBC
The Xbox and PlayStation2 get their own dose of old-school arcade action with this collection of 14 Namco titles. The likes of *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Pole Position* will jostle for space with *Rolling Thunder* and *Galaga*.

OCTOBER '05

Sonic Gems Collection
Date: 7 October **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC
Finally, after years of seeing us harp on about it in the Retro section, new gamers will be able to see if all the fuss over *Sonic CD* is justified. Other titles include a re-jigged *Sonic The Fighters*, the PC version of *Sonic R* and several Game Gear titles from *Sonic Mega Collection Plus*.

Sega Classics Collection
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC
Sega's latest compilation features remakes of many of its classic arcade games and is available for PS2. *Golden Axe*, *OutRun*, *Space Harrier* and *Columns* are just a few of the games on the disc.

NOVEMBER '05

Tecmo Classic Arcade
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Tecmo **Price:** TBC
Tecmo has a rather interesting compilation lined up for the end of the year. While this contains some highly addictive games – including *Bomb Jack* and *Solomon's Key* – many of the titles are quite obscure. But with only 11 titles to choose from, value for money could be an issue.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk





Over the past 36 issues of games™ we've bombarded you with some of our best (and worst) retro moments. Games like *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Lemmings* and *The Legend Of Zelda: The Ocarina Of Time* have been universally adored, while others such as *Umihara Kawase* and *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru* have only been championed by a select few. But now that's all about to change as we want you to tell us what you think are the greatest retro games ever.

Over the next few months you'll be able to vote for your most-loved retro games of all time. Does *Pac-Man* still hold a special place in your heart? Do you constantly return to *Jet Set Willy* or *Head Over Heels*? Are you still racking up immense scores on *Galaxians* and *Bubble Bobble*? Perhaps you're still in love with *Out Run*, or maybe you're a sucker for classic point-and-click adventures like *The Day Of The Tentacle* and *Sam & Max Hit The Road*. It doesn't matter how famous, obscure or critically lauded the games are – we want to hear about them anyway.

Cynics may argue that polls like this are useless as the same old games constantly crop up in the top ten, but this isn't about what 'they' want; it's about you. So if you want the world to know that *Super Turrican 2* is the greatest game ever, then there's never been a better time to tell everyone.

HOW DO I VOTE?

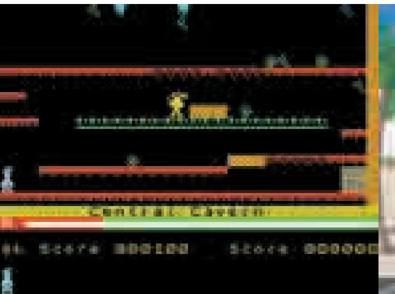
Every reader is allowed five votes and you need to list your games in order of preference. You can vote by emailing gamestm@paragon.co.uk (putting 'Greatest Games Ever' as the subject) or on our retro forum at www.gamestm.co.uk. Voting closes on 8 November, so you've plenty of time to have your say before the big rundown across issues 39 and 40…

gamestm@paragon.co.uk
www.gamestm.co.uk.

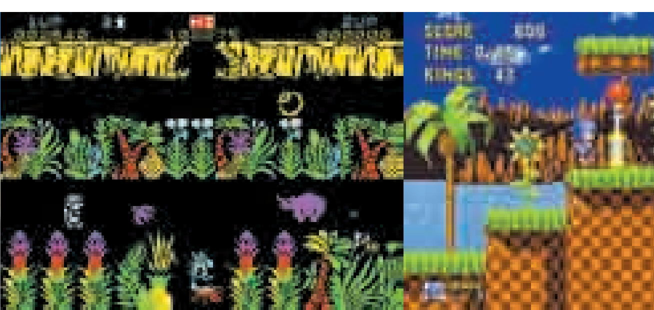
SO WHAT GAMES ARE ELIGIBLE?



As far as consoles go the cut-off point is the Dreamcast, so any platforms that pre-date that are fair game and the Dreamcast itself is included. For the PC and PlayStation, which are still supported, you can have any game released in or before 2000.







GREAT GAME BOSSES



KING K. ROOL IN DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

Release: 1994
Format: SNES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare



You'd expect final bosses to be tough, but when you consider how easy it was to defeat the many foes in *Donkey Kong Country*, the encounter with King K. Rool aboard his pirate ship still came as a nasty shock.

After a long, hard slog that saw Donkey and Diddy Kong negotiating snowy mountains, lush jungles and creepy mines, the simian duo got to face off against their sworn nemesis.

The king of the Kremlins wasn't willing to give up DK's final banana without a fight (he'd stolen Kong's entire horde at the start of the game) and flung his trusty crown at the loveable monkeys. Dodging the regal headgear, DK's furry butt landed on K. Rool's scaly noggin and sent the oversized alligator into his second wave of attacks.

Rather then simply waiting to be set upon by his opponents, K. Rool dashed across the screen several times in an attempt to catch the two furry buggers off guard. Diddy and DK weren't having any of it though, and a few more direct hits on K. Rool got their reptilian foe really mad.

Leaping from one side of his ship to the other, K. Rool's next step was to crush our heroes with cannonballs. Thanks to some frantic dodging the agile apes were able to avoid the deadly projectiles and a final butt bounce saw their dreaded foe slump to the floor. The credits rolled, and it was all over. Wasn't it…?



▲ Actual footage from Channel 5's *When Apes Attack.*

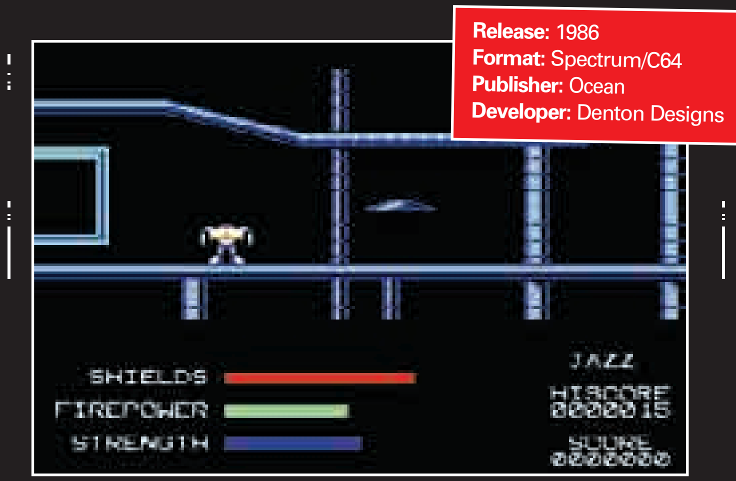
Nope. K. Rool jumped up at the end of the credits and bounced around like a lunatic, but after a few more well-timed jumps K. Rool hit the deck for good and the monkeys could reclaim DK's banana. Tasty.

Worst LICENCE EVER

Licensed games have a history of being at the shoddy end of the scale, but some manage to out-shoddy even the lamest and most tenuous games…

THE TRANSFORMERS

Release: 1986
Format: Spectrum/C64
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Denton Designs



▲ Looks like the only transformation he's going to make is into a slightly more lacklustre bunch of pixels.

It's hard to find someone who didn't like Transformers when they were younger. The rich kids would be proudly showing off their Soundwaves or Megatrons, while the rest of us had to simply make do with running around the playground pretending to morph into a toaster. Yup, Transformers were bloody great, so imagine how gutted we were when Ocean released Denton Designs' atrocious computer game.

There's nothing worse then spending all your pocket money on a title that's an absolute dog, and *Transformers* was one of the worst. Horrendous visuals that looked nothing like their cartoon counterparts, some dire music (just listen to the theme tune get butchered) and non-existent gameplay all combined to create a turd of gigantic proportions. While many of us would no doubt have sat patiently in front of our TVs in an effort to enjoy our new purchase, Denton Designs had made such a balls up that even the most determined of us were soon reaching for the power switch.

The in-game Transformers were ridiculously hard to control, an issue that was made even more annoying by the erratic collision detection that saw you hitting objects that were nowhere near you. Add the fact that transforming into vehicles was a horribly laborious (and fiddly) process and it's little wonder this game is remembered for all the wrong reasons.



A BREED APART



In 1991, a tiny British developer unleashed an exciting run-and-gun game onto the Amiga. Several successful sequels followed, until 1997 when the series took a nosedive and fell off the gaming radar. Ashley Day picks up a bloodied battle rifle and charges into the past to find out why…

"Team 17 didn't struggle to be innovators and originators; they struggled to take a genre and make the best possible Amiga version of that genre." So says Marcus Dyson, former project manager at Team 17, and he's right. No matter which genre it tackled, the developer churned out hit after hit. *Project X* was the Amiga's very own *Gradius*, *Superfrog* expertly echoed *Sonic*, and *Alien Breed* was *Gauntlet* with guns.

Its visual style may have been cribbed from HR Giger but *Alien Breed*'s gameplay was pure Atari. The relentless enemies, collectable keys, co-operative play and the disembodied voice alerting players to their low health, all came from the Ed Logg School of Game Design. Yet *Alien Breed* remained a terrific game in its own right, taking these borrowed elements and threading them into one of the smoothest arcade games the Amiga had seen.

The gameplay, already a proven formula, was made more addictive by the tense atmosphere: like the *Alien* movies, any moments of calm were terrifying as you anticipated the appearance of the ominously absent Xenomorphs. When they finally emerged from the depths of the space station they seemed to come in their hundreds, charging towards you and into the flashing lights of gunfire before exploding in a gory mess with a primal screech.

In many ways, *Alien Breed* was a 2D precursor to *Doom*. Much of the game took place in tight corridors and asked little more of the player than to rampage through levels as quickly as possible with a thumb glued to the fire button, only stopping to collect items and buy new weapons from the station's beautifully voiced computer terminals. Additional weapons, such as the Laser and Flamethrower, allowed for quicker destruction of the beasts and cemented the game's emphasis on non-stop blasting action. The seamless mix of sci-fi atmosphere and co-operative shooting thrills made *Alien Breed* an instant hit and it achieved massive critical acclaim. *CU Amiga* awarded the title 90%, claiming that "Team 17 have come up with a winner" – a remarkable achievement for a studio that started life as a small shareware distributor and that had previously made only one commercial game.





FROM SHARE TO WHERE?

Team 17 was founded in 1990 by Martyn Brown, who hand-picked his team from the contacts he made while running the Wakefield-based shareware dealer 17-bit Software. Among them was Rico Holmes, an artist who became responsible for almost all of the graphics in *Alien Breed*. As well as taking his inspiration from the *Alien* movies, Holmes was hugely influenced by the C64 game *Laser Squad* and used those influences to design *Alien Breed*. Another Team 17 founder, Allister Brimble, composed the music for *Breed*. His haunting title theme sent shivers up the spine as it created a foreboding atmosphere that went on to characterise a game that shouldn't be played alone. Andreas Tadic, whose skilful programming ensured that the game ran in a full screen with fast, smooth scrolling, rounded off the main development team.

"ALIEN BREED WAS A REMARKABLE FEAT FOR A DEVELOPER THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY RELEASED ONLY ONE COMMERCIAL GAME"

This small team of enthusiasts had made a game so popular that Amiga owners were soon shouting out for a sequel. Team 17's mailbox was swamped with letters from fans who were quick to offer a list of everything they wanted to see in a follow-up. As the team were aware of *Alien Breed*'s phenomenal popularity, a sequel was already planned but was still some way off. The decision was made to appease eager *Breed*ers by releasing *Alien Breed Special Edition '92*. By doubling the number of levels from six to 12 and introducing new levels that took place in almost complete darkness, the game became twice as good and went on to occupy the charts for over a year.

The true sequel landed in 1993 and was an enormous leap forward from its predecessors. The opening level saw the heroes fight their way into a complex by dodging low-flying helicopters, making it clear that this *Alien Breed* would be much tougher. Some aliens could now shoot back, while the levels were rigged to self-destruct with only a few seconds ▶


▼ There were 250 ways through *Tower Assault*. Seen them all?

DON'T OWN AN AMIGA?

Those who feel the urge to play one of the many excellent *Alien Breed* games (we'll pretend that *Killing Grounds* doesn't exist) should head to www.dream17.co.uk where almost all of Team 17's classic Amiga titles can be legally downloaded for free. The site also has a load of other Team 17 goodies such as screensavers and regular news updates. For an alternative look at the *Alien Breed* scene visit www.mentalillusion.co.uk/alienbreed for its interesting *Alien Breed* remake. It's an open source project so anyone with the right software can join in.

to escape. This meant that it was foolish to stay in one place for any amount of time and that the weapon upgrades became indispensable. As in the Japanese shooters that Team 17 loved, you wouldn't get far unless you had the right weapons. As well as the standard Machine Gun, *Alien Breed II* offered a Triple Laser, Homing Missiles, Flamethrower, Rebounder and Grenade Launcher. Of these, the Rebounder was the most fun: its bouncy bullets let you dash about while the unsuspecting aliens took one in the head before they even saw you.

Alien Breed II was a guns-blazing arcade game and though its follow-up lost none of the action, *Alien Breed Tower Assault* proved to be much more strategic. The new sequel featured enhancements that vastly improved the existing formula. Each level now had several exits, making the game a branching, non-linear adventure, and depending on which of the 250 unique routes a player took, they would experience extreme contrasts in difficulty and reveal different pieces of the story. To get the most out of *Tower Assault*, and to see each of the massive 50 levels, you had to complete the game several times.

Team 17 also implemented a Retreat mode where players could walk backwards while firing. This made tough situations a little easier and added to the feeling of being a movie hero as you let the aliens chase you down a corridor, knowing that you were the one who would come out alive. Graphical effects were also given a major overhaul, resulting in the best looking of the 2D *Alien Breed* games. The highly detailed graphics created a vivid impression of being in a real world as you encountered crashed fighter ships, discovered mutilated corpses and scavenged from colonists' living quarters. This particular *Alien Breed* has stood the test of time better than most, largely due to its longevity. After several years it's still possible to take unique routes and discover hidden areas and secrets.

DIMENSION JUMP

By 1995 the games market was changing in ways that would affect the industry for the next ten years. *Doom* had begun to rival major religions in its number of faithful converts and soon major software publishers would adopt the attitude that if it wasn't 3D it wasn't worth making. The PC market quickly became overcrowded with 3D *Doom*-alikes and the Amiga would need its own FPS if it was to successfully compete.

"WITH ALIEN BREED 3D AMIGA GAMERS FINALLY HAD A FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER THAT WAS GRAPHICALLY IMPRESSIVE AND ATMOSPHERIC"

After meeting enthusiastic programmer Andy Clitheroe and seeing the first-person engine he had created single-handedly on the Amiga, Team 17 knew that it could be one of the first to bring the genre to the 32-bit A1200 and immediately acquired the young coder and his work. Team 17 saw the opportunities that Andy's engine brought and was soon on the phone to id Software. "I spoke to John Carmack about licensing *Doom* for the Amiga," Marcus Dyson tells us. "He said, 'Technically, it can't be done; you can't do a first-person shooter on the Amiga' and they shut the door on us." Undeterred by Carmack's lack of faith, Team 17 went ahead with the project and built Andy's demo into the first three-dimensional *Alien Breed*.

Alien Breed 3D was technically unlike any of the previous incarnations and required a new set of skilled programmers and artists to push the series into the third dimension. Clitheroe handled all of the coding duties and contributed to the graphics with Team 17 newcomers Michael Green and Charles Blessing. The only person to have previously worked on a Team 17 game was the musician Björn Lynne, composer on *Worms*. Despite mostly being a team of first-timers, Andy and co produced a polished and playable FPS.

Amiga gamers finally had a first-person shooter, which was graphically impressive and highly atmospheric. Level design deserves special mention as this was one of the few Amiga games of this type to use levels with more than one floor and the game played much better for this technically difficult addition. Unfortunately, it felt a little too much like *Doom* and not enough like the traditional *Alien Breed* games. The main reason for this was that there just weren't enough enemies on screen at

once; where the 2D games had bombarded the player with waves of aliens this version could only manage to get two or three on the go at any one time. The series' much loved two-player mode returned but also proved to be disappointing as it merely placed two players in a level with no enemies and all the doors open. Nevertheless, *Alien Breed 3D* was an excellent achievement and fully deserved the fan adulation and critical acclaim that it received. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of its sequel…

Confident of their abilities, the new *Alien Breed* development team set about creating an ambitious sequel that would run in real 3D (think *Quake* rather than *Doom*) and in high-resolution full screen. *Alien Breed 3D II: The Killing Grounds* appeared in 1996 and made good on those promises, but at considerable expense. Though the team achieved its lofty graphical ambitions, the game ran at a snail's pace even when using the best graphics card. The non-existent enemy AI was another problem: as soon as you entered a room every alien would already be waiting in the doorway to mess you up.

The highly anticipated level editor also failed to live up to the hype as it required a downloadable patch despite only a few Amiga owners having internet access. Lastly, several players complained that the control method was keyboard-only rather than the mouse-look standard to which PC gamers had become accustomed. It was clear to everyone

"ALIEN BREED 2K4 WAS DUE TO RESURRECT THE CLASSIC 2D GAMEPLAY WITH IMPROVED GRAPHICS. SADLY, IT WAS PUT ON HOLD EARLY IN 2005 AND HASN'T BEEN SEEN SINCE"

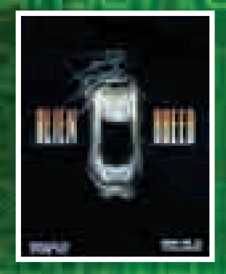
that Team 17 had rushed *The Killing Grounds* out in order to make a reasonable profit from the diminishing Amiga market. Consequently, *Amiga Power* gave the release a critical mauling, awarding it only 59% – the lowest *Alien Breed* score of all time.

By 1997 the Amiga market was beginning to dry up. Team 17 released its final game for the classic computer and swiftly moved on to the PC and PlayStation. Choosing to concentrate on the highly lucrative *Worms* franchise, it swiftly forgot about *Alien Breed*. A couple of revival attempts have been made in recent years but neither proved fruitful. The first of these was *Alien Breed Assault*, a real-time strategy title that got quite far into development in 1998 before being canned due to lack of publisher interest. *Alien Breed 2K4* was to resurrect the classic 2D gameplay with vastly improved graphics and was even due to include the signature co-operative mode. Sadly, the game was put on hold in early 2005 and little of it has been seen since.

Regardless of whether it ever makes a comeback, *Alien Breed* will always be a classic blaster that stands the test of time.

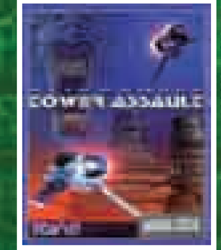
A DIFFERENT BREED

The Alien Breed games were released across different formats but which were the best?



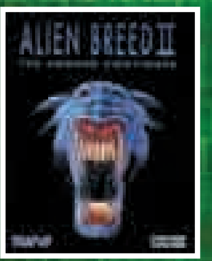
Alien Breed

As well as debuting on the A500, *Alien Breed* also appeared on Commodore's ill-fated CD32 console. While it was identical to the original A500 version, the CD32 disc also contained *Qwak*, a highly addictive platform puzzler, that added extra value for money to those CD32 gamers who already owned the original *Alien Breed*. A PC version of *Alien Breed* was also produced in 1993 and had improved graphics that were identical to those seen in the superb *Tower Assault*.



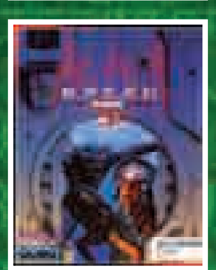
Alien Breed Tower Assault

The best *Alien Breed* game was made even better when it appeared on the CD32. Not only did it include a copy of *Alien Breed II* but also had a CD soundtrack and a rather embarrassing FMV intro featuring Team 17 staff. The PC version, however, was a complete mess that had fewer levels and kicked out the brilliant non-linear gameplay in favour of a boring and restrictive linear route.



Alien Breed II: The Horror Continues

There were two Amiga versions of *Alien Breed II*. The first was released for the A1200 in December 1993 and the second was released the following January on the A500. The A500 version had fewer colours and the least Aliens, which meant that it ran a little faster and was ultimately an easier game. Stick with the A1200 version for a better challenge.



Alien Breed 3D

The box for the CD32 version of *Alien Breed* 3D claimed that it had more levels than the floppy disk version. Don't believe a word of it. It does include a digital audio soundtrack, though, making it slightly superior to the floppy edition. *Alien Breed 3D II: The Killing Grounds* proved a massive disappointment. Not only was it incredibly slow, it also featured uninspired levels, extremely disappointing visuals and a horrific aiming system. Stick with the original…

CLASH OF THE TITANS

M•E•T•R•O-C•R•O•S•S

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month it's the 8-bit computer versions of radical futuristic title *Metro-Cross*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The C64 gets off to a ropey start due to some indistinguishable sprites although, to be fair, the main character looks spot-on. Things don't get much better with the backdrops – they're extremely dull and lack the vibrancy of the arcade original. Fortunately, some superbly smooth scrolling saves the day. A solid start for the C64.

SPECTRUM: As is sometimes the case, the Spectrum struggles against its peers. While its fantastic sprites put the C64 to shame, its scrolling is even worse than the Amstrad's. We can understand the lack of colour, but the horrendous scrolling made our heads spin after a few minutes. The Spectrum once again finds itself relegated to third place.

AMSTRAD: The Amstrad does a great job at capturing *Metro-Cross*' vibrant style and is the most accurate 8-bit version in terms of looks. Everything is nice and visible and it's easy to spot incoming objects. Sadly, jerky scrolling and slow movement totally kill the pace of the game.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: We'd normally be praising the C64 in this category but we're a bit upset with the *Metro-Cross* soundtrack as it has none of the oomph you'd expect from the excellent SID chip. Luckily, the spot effects are surprisingly solid and give the game that little extra punch. Still, we expected a lot more.

SPECTRUM: Oh dear, the humble Speccy sound chip once again causes problems. There's no title-screen music and the in-game tune that accompanies the other 8-bit versions is also absent, meaning that the Spectrum has to rely on effects to save the day. Sadly, the few blips and bleeps that do accompany the action sound like digital farts. We'd rather play in silence…

AMSTRAD: After failing in the graphics category the Amstrad bounces back with a spot-on audio performance. Like the C64 tune it's a great rendition of the arcade theme but sounds a lot punchier and has none of the C64's 'tinniness'. Add some decent spot effects and the Amstrad is the clear winner.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: COMMODORE 64

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: The C64 steals the gameplay round thanks to its smooth scrolling. It's easy to time jumps and the responsive controls ensure that playing *Metro-Cross* with keys or a joystick is equally pleasurable. It doesn't look much like the arcade game but it plays like it, and that suits us.

SPECTRUM: Playing *Metro-Cross* on the Spectrum isn't much fun. When you're not struggling with some very spongey controls you'll find yourself battling ropey collision detection and that off-putting scrolling. It's certainly a brave effort, but the humble Spectrum just can't deliver and doesn't even manage to reach the finish line, let alone cross it.

AMSTRAD: While the Amstrad version of *Metro-Cross* is pretty responsive the collision detection is less satisfying. The slow jumps are also annoying and you'll find yourself mistiming leaps or ending up flat on your back. It's better than the Spectrum game, but the Amstrad's stuttering scrolling lets it down.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

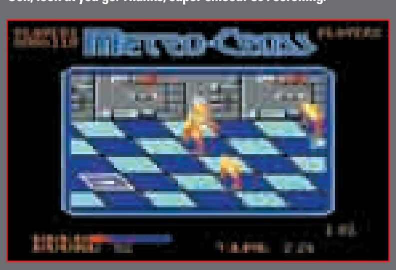
AND THE WINNER IS…

COMMODORE 64

The C64 has been having a rough time in Clash Of The Titans lately so it's nice to see it nab first place. There's no doubt that *Metro-Cross* is a fairly obscure title, but that shouldn't mean that the conversions should be poor. Luckily, the C64 perfectly captures all the enjoyment of the arcade game and still stands up today.

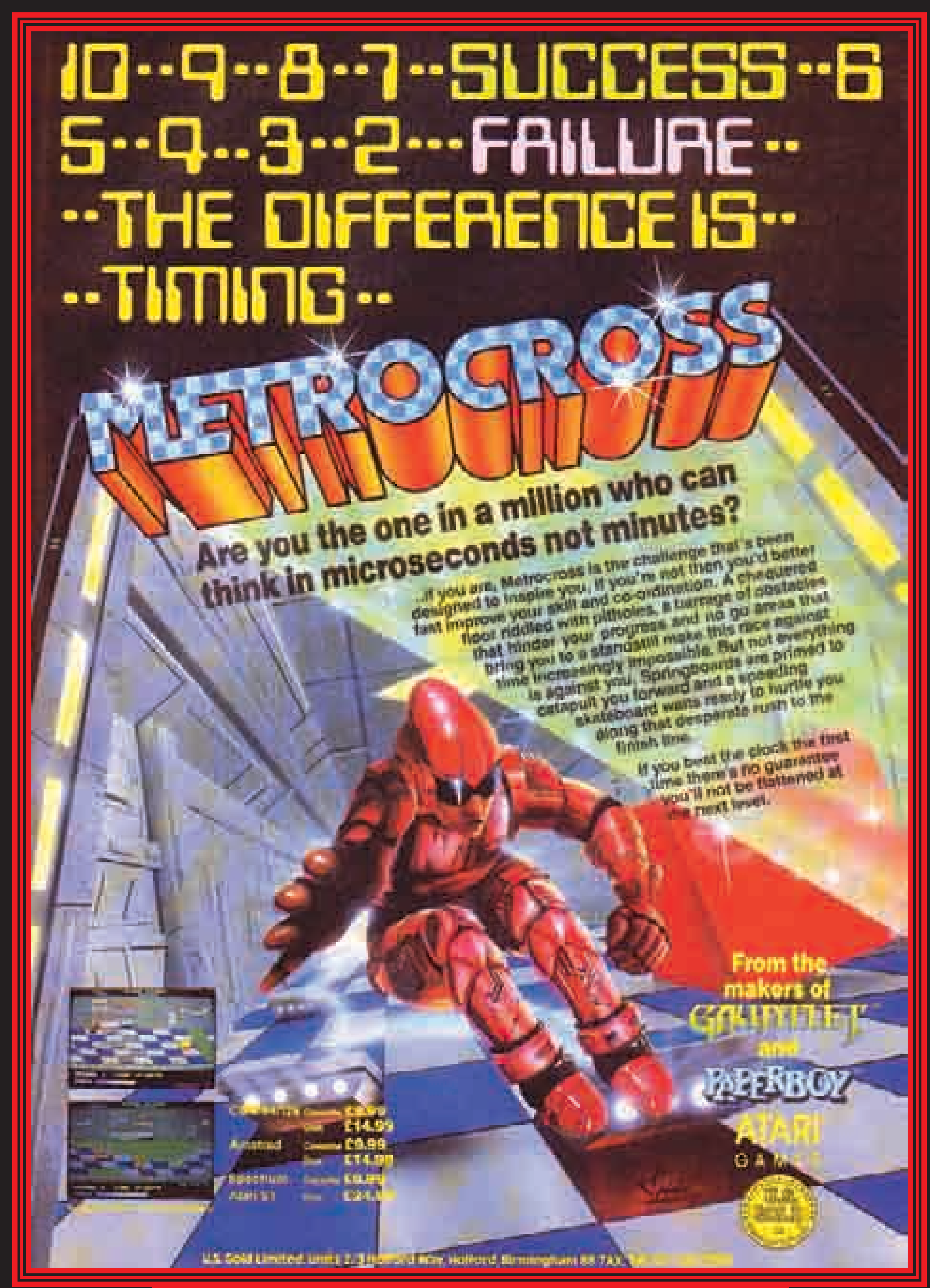


Ooh, look at you go. Thanks, super-smooth C64 scrolling.



You call that futuristic? Oh dear, Spectrum. Must try harder.





METRO-CROSS (Various Home Systems) US Gold, 1987 – Original UK advertisement

Hardware Leg

MACHINE SPECIFICATIONS

PROCESSOR: 6507 @ 1.19MHz. This is a cost-reduced version of the 6502 used in other Atari 8-bit machines.
LAUNCH PRICE: $200 including two joysticks and a set of paddles.
MEMORY: 128 bytes internal RAM. It could initially read 4K ROM cartridges, but methods were created later in its life to have bigger games – some were a massive 16K.
SOUND: Two-channel sound generated from the graphics chip.
GRAPHICS CAPABILITIES: All graphics are generated by the TIA chip (often called the Stella chip) that can generate a high resolution of 160 x 200 and 128 colours. This chip is clocked at 3.58MHz but requires the processor to drive it, leaving less than 50 per cent of the processor's time free to do everything else. Sprites are eight bits and can be as tall as the screen.





ATARI 2600

Wooden finish, stiff joysticks, simple games – and yet Atari's classic is still one of most appreciated consoles ever made…

Videogaming in the Seventies often meant one thing – *Pong*. The arcade game was so popular that the market was flooded with various clones for people to play through their television sets, which was a huge novelty at the time. And although *Pong* impressed many, something more was needed, and it seemed only one company could deliver. That company was Atari. With its CX-2600 VCS (to give it its Sunday name) it gave the world the one thing people craved – games with versatility. By creating a machine that could play a range of different games, Atari kickstarted the market for videogames consoles, in the process giving the world its first console legend.

IN THE BEGINNING

Atari wasn't the first company to come up with a programmable games console; Fairchild Semiconductor implemented one in August 1976, even though both companies had been working on such a system around the same time. Fairchild's machine, the VES (Video Entertainment System), boasted two innovations: it stored its games on ROM cartridges and it had a rudimentary joystick.

Perhaps the VES is the true forefather of the games consoles as it made it to market first, but Fairchild Semiconductor didn't have Atari's association with videogaming. Even with a low price and its modest success, the VES wasn't able to compete with Atari's killer console.

THE BASTARD SON

If Fairchild's VES was the forefather of console gaming, then Atari's machine was its bastard son. It was designed during 1976 under the project name 'Stella' and borrowed a few design ideas from the VES, such as a wood-grain veneer and game-select switches.

Atari's owner and founder, Nolan Bushnell, realised that the Stella would have to have improvements over Fairchild's machine, but because of cash-flow problems at the company the Stella looked as though it was doomed never to make it to market. In a strategic move, Bushnell sold Atari for $28 million to Warner Communications, who then put $100 million into research and development, as Warner was sure that it would not only make money from the console but from the games Atari would release for it.

The Atari CX-2600 VCS was eventually launched in October 1977, costing a reasonable $200 and with a choice of nine games. With six switches and two joystick ports the console was packed with features and, like Fairchild's VES, it didn't look like a simple toy but a console for the future. Despite having cost-reduced components – the main processor was a cut-down 6502, for instance – it could display an amazing 128 colours (16 main colours and eight brightnesses of each), and had a high resolution of 160 x 200.

Sales of the VCS were initially disappointing, although the quality of its software was largely unmatched

Hardware Legend



▲ Everyone loves *Dig Dug* – and if you don't, you're clearly not as great as you think you are.

even on the far more sophisticated computer systems from Apple, Commodore and Tandy that year (in fairness, home computers tended to be used more for business applications than games).

After the slow start, sales started to pick up and the company reportedly grossed over $400 million in 1978. The machine was certainly on the map and on the wish-lists of many children worldwide, but in order to maintain its success something was needed that would make the console more popular and desirable, and that something became the world's first killer-app.

INVADED!

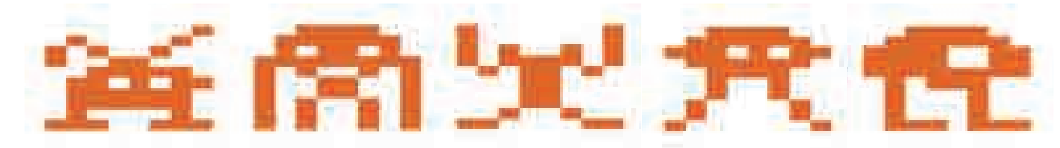
The next milestone in videogaming after *Pong* was undoubtedly *Space Invaders*. An opportunity was looming to bring this game into the home, and in 1979 Atari brought the rights to this popular Japanese arcade game, releasing it on the VCS in 1980. The game caused a boom in sales of the VCS, coming to a head by the Christmas period of that year. Sales of the VCS had broken the two million mark and it was considered the console for the best games. But there were tough times approaching…

Many machines tried to knock the VCS off its throne, such as the VIC-20, Mattel Intellivision and Magnavox Odyssey II, and to add to the turmoil, Bushnell left Atari after becoming unhappy with the way Warner was running the company. He signed an agreement not to compete against it for five years, but Atari saw its biggest threat from a new company called Activision, formed by former Atari employees who were also unhappy with Warner's management.

With Activision's knowledge of the VCS hardware it produced some of the best (and most technically impressive) games for the hardware, which outshone Atari's own releases. Atari almost fatally rushed out big-name licences to follow the success of *Space Invaders*. Backed with TV advertising, an official version of *Pac-Man* appeared in 1981 but the code was an early beta version and was released despite not being ready.

This was followed by probably the world's first – and worst – movie tie-in; the absolutely appalling *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* was about as pointless a game as… well, words can't quite describe it. Atari had somehow banked on selling millions of copies of each, and although *Pac-Man* did reasonably well, the company had manufactured somewhere in the region of six million *E.T.* cartridges (even though there were only around five million machines sold at that point). After selling around a million copies of *E.T.* and making a huge loss, Atari buried the remaining stock in the desert in Alamogordo, New Mexico, along with the unsold copies of *Pac-Man*.

"SPACE INVADERS CAUSED A BOOM IN SALES OF THE VCS THAT PEAKED IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS"



RE-ISSUE

By 1982, new VCS machines no longer had the classic wood-grain veneer. This was replaced with an all-black, all-modern Eighties look, sometimes referred to as the 'Darth Vader' model, probably due to the release of the Parker Brothers game *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* in the same year. It was now known officially as the Atari 2600, but still displayed the VCS acronym just above the cartridge port so as not to

WHY I ❤ MY 2600

Sunday afternoon – Dad's out fishing, Mum's making tea, and my brother and I are arguing over whether to play *Tanks* or *Jets In Combat* on our 2600. Can childhood memories get any better? The likes of *Space Invaders* and *Pitfall* on the 2600 were what got me into games in the first place and for that I am eternally grateful. The joysticks might have been stiff and the wooden panelling screamed Seventies kitsch, but you couldn't fault the gameplay its titles offered. Never mind that it revolutionised home gaming, for me the 2600 was a great piece of kit that I couldn't have lived without.

MARTIN MATHERS





▲ The highly sought-after 'Darth Vader' model of the 2600, complete with black finish that many preferred over the original wooden style. ▶ Of course, the reason behind the nickname for Atari's relaunched model was that it came out at the same time as *Empire Strikes Back*.

confuse prospective punters. However, the ageing hardware was starting to look dated, and gamers were making an exodus to pastures new, or so it seemed.

While home computers were becoming the entertainment systems of choice for gamers around the world (thanks to cheaper media and the fact the machines could be programmed by anyone with a little logic and imagination) there was a great deal of uncertainty in the games market that led to the crash of 1984. Many companies pulled out of the market but the Atari 2600 remained in production, while Atari had a change of management again, with Jack Tramiel leaving Commodore to buy Atari.

With the crash Tramiel saw the potential in the home computer market and pushed Atari into developing the ST and extending its 8-bit range. Plans for a successor to the 2600, along with a redesign of the original machine, were shelved – but only until Nintendo and Sega launched the NES and Master System in 1985 and 1986 respectively.

"THE 2600 JUNIOR WAS A HUGELY SUCCESSFUL RELAUNCH – IT WOULD BE LIKE SEGA RE-RELEASING THE SATURN TODAY"

Reassessing the potential for games consoles, the repackaged 2600 Junior and successor, the 7800, were back on the cards and both saw the light of day in 1986. The 7800 was rather underwhelming but the 2600 Junior was a hugely successful relaunch – it would be almost like Sega re-releasing the Saturn today.

The industry and press were certainly very sceptical of the two consoles, apart from the UK's *Atari User* magazine, of course. There's always a call for niche magazines to be positive about the area that they cover, but *Atari User* occasionally took this too far. Almost every game it reviewed on the Atari 8-bit platform would typically receive at least seven out of ten.

True to form, and to tie in with Atari's TV advertising campaign in the UK for the run-up to Christmas 1988, it gave a warm appraisal of the 2600 Junior in its September 1988 issue, dubbing it the "Very Clever System", even though it was plainly pretty primitive for the time. It did, however, correctly gauge who the 2600 Junior was aimed at, stating that "it makes an ideal companion for any 8-bit Atari home computer. If dad's busy typing away and the kids want to play a game, just plug the VCS into the TV and away they go."

EXTENDED PLAY

Despite this innovation, this really was the beginning of the end for Atari's hardware, but the 2600 Junior lasted until 1989 before it was pulled, with a revised model (which included 128 built-in games) selling in parts of Europe until 1992. Some retailers were still carrying games for it until 1993. Continuing its legacy is Atari's latest TV-game, the Flashback 2.0, which rather than being an emulated 2600 is actually a fully hardware-compatible device that can be hacked to add things like a cartridge port.

So, even now, 28 years after its launch, the Atari 2600 is still more or less available to buy from high-street stores, and its full history may not yet be completely written, especially with the great number of enthusiasts who continue to develop new games for the hardware.

It is said that Nolan Bushnell only originally intended the machine's shelf life to be a few years, so the fact that it ended up spanning four decades is pretty impressive…



▲ Oh dear – the crappy *E.T.* and unsold *Pac-Man* carts that Atari buried in the desert under a concrete blanket.

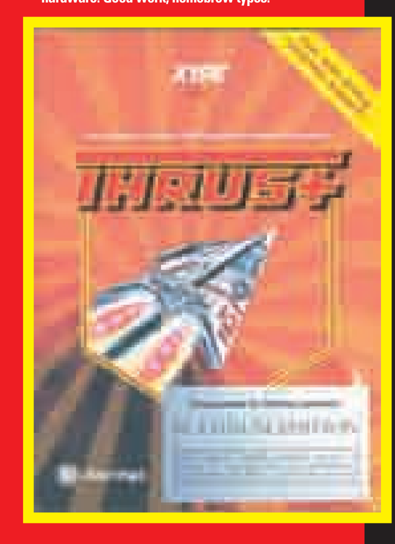


FACTOIDS

- It's thought that over 30 million units of the Atari VCS were sold during its commercial lifetime (a whopping 14 years). Very few consoles have managed this feat, nor had such longevity while keeping their original specifications.
- Homebrew enthusiasts, most based in America, continue to develop new games for the 2600, enjoying the challenge the limited hardware presents. In 2000, programming guru Thomas Jentzsch wowed the world when he ported the BBC Micro classic *Thrust* to the machine, and further improved the game releasing a DC and Platinum edition. This is available to buy on cartridge from the online store at www.atariage.com. Those without a real 2600 can download the emulator image free from the same site.



▲ *Thrust* is a remarkable feat for the limited 2600 hardware. Good work, homebrew types.





ROBOTRON 2084

Constantino & Jeanine '82

Behind The Scenes

Playing *Robotron: 2084* in its original arcade incarnation is an experience that stays with you forever. From the moment your credit registers and your hands rest upon the cabinet's twin joysticks, you know you're in for a treat. Get good at *Robotron* and you'll develop almost superhuman reflexes that allow you to duck and dive through waves of relentless enemies. It's an amazing sensation that has rarely been duplicated by any other shoot-'em-up – and you owe it all to Eugene Jarvis.

Considering he had ambitions to become a biochemist, it's strange that Jarvis moved into the games industry. After dabbling in computing at school he studied the subject at university, eventually landing a job creating pinball games for Atari. When Atari's pinball division shut down a few years later, Jarvis pitched up at Williams and became enamoured with the new videogames that were starting to appear, so he began work on his first game.

Defender appeared in 1980 and blew gamers away. After the uniformity of *Space Invaders*, *Defender* was like nothing else around. Ridiculously fast sprites, an intense control system and superbly balanced gameplay created a title that's still fantastic 25 years later. For many, though, it's *Robotron: 2084* that's the pinnacle of Jarvis' career and the game's reputation is thoroughly deserved. And it all came from a very simple idea…

"From a game design perspective, the set-up was to essentially take *Space Invaders* into two dimensions," says Jarvis of what he hoped to achieve with *Robotron*. "Instead of moving in a line fighting enemies coming from above, *Robotron* allowed you to move in full 2D space, with enemies coming from all sides and shooting in all directions at once. Take the challenge of *Space Invaders* and square it – that's what we set out to achieve with *Robotron*."

One idea that didn't get past the drawing-board stage would have made *Robotron* a fundamentally different game; rather than

Released: 1982
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Williams
Developer: Vid Kidz

To many retro gamers, Eugene Jarvis is a god. After lighting up arcades with his astounding Defender, he returned with Stargate and the amazing Robotron: 2084, easily one of the most frenetic shooters ever made. Eager to learn more, Retro talks to Jarvis about one of his greatest creations…



▼ When you've had as many hits as Eugene Jarvis you can pull all the silly poses you want. Don't be fooled by his crazy antics though, he's a gaming god. Kneel down before him, puny mortal…



shooting Robotrons you would have had to guide them into electrodes. However, Jarvis isn't really known for pacifistic games and the idea was quickly – and wisely – dropped.

AI TO DIE FOR

With the inspiration in place it was time for Jarvis to put his ideas in motion. Collaborating with Larry DeMar (with whom he had already worked on *Defender* and *Stargate*), Jarvis had the core concept of *Robotron* up and running within three days; the game was completed in just six months. But development wasn't without its problems. "Our biggest challenge was technical and was about handling the massive quantities of enemies and particle effects," explains Jarvis. "We had what was one of the first graphics co-processor chips designed to help with the video throughput. It was a 1MHz graphics processor, and through very clever machine code and micro code we were able to handle about 150 enemies on screen at once – Larry and I nearly lost our minds making it work."

As if having that many enemies on screen wasn't enough to drive Jarvis and DeMar round the bend, the pair were determined to make sure they were smart opponents, and the game features an interesting array of AI routines: Grunts couldn't shoot and would try to overwhelm you with sheer numbers, while the nefarious Brains could fire

TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART

Developer Digital Eclipse is no stranger to *Robotron: 2084* having created several decent conversions of it over the years for various platforms. While our favourite version is easily the one that's currently available on the first *Midway Arcade Treasures* compilation, special mention has to go to the free online version available at www.shockwave.com/sw/content/robotron. Originally released in July 2000, this version came about after Midway commissioned Digital Eclipse to recreate ten of its most popular games in order to show off Shockwave's web content. While it plays fine with various joysticks, it's liable to seriously damage your health if you try playing with a keyboard. Having to control a plethora of different keys with each hand is an absolute nightmare and is no substitute for the original controls. Still, at least it isn't costing you anything…

Cruise Missiles that would follow you around the screen. "We had the Grunt finished in the first week," confirms Jarvis. "Its AI was to always seek the player on the shortest possible route and ignore anything else in its path. In all though, several weeks were spent tweaking each enemy with extensive play testing."

The AI was also remarkable for its spontaneity. "Virtually no behaviour in *Robotron* is deterministic," Jarvis explains. "There's always a random factor added to any behaviour for more interest. It's amazing how players will associate random events with mood or intelligence of enemies. We constantly want to make sense out of nonsense. We see the game as being pissed off or angry when there has just been a bad lot of random numbers drawn. Or we think we are 'on a roll', when merely we have gotten a lot of lucky random draws." To complement its exceptional AI, *Robotron* also featured a great difficulty curve. While the first few Waves were relatively simple the enemies soon started to swamp you and it became a real struggle to finish later levels. Jarvis attributes this success to continual playtesting. "That was the beauty of design in those early days," he explains. "Because we had *Robotron* up and running in its basic form we were able to play the game constantly throughout its development cycle. This contrasts to many complex games today that are often playable only in the final few weeks before their release.

"We also didn't have game testers, just ourselves, so there was a very tight design loop where the game could be refined very rapidly. I think we were also lucky that we were good but not great players, so we avoided the tendency by expert gamers to make things impossible for the average player – what was at





▲ Arcade legend Archer Maclean was so pleased when he heard about our *Robotron* feature he lent us pictures of his own personal cabinets. Cheers, mate

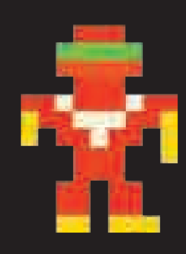
KNOW YOUR ENEMY

The key to understanding Robotron's baddies



SPHEROIDS

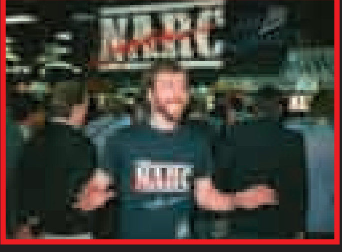
These circular foes drop Enforcers that rapidly pursue you with deadly guided missiles. They're extremely fast so be careful. In fact, just avoid them instead



GRUNTS

They don't shoot but instead try to overpower you en-masse. No matter how good you become at *Robotron*, a group of Grunts will always makes you nervous.

▼ A young Jarvis promotes *Narc*. Considering how great this original was, it's amazing that Midway got so many things wrong with last year's sequel.



▼ Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar proved an unstoppable combination and brought Vid Kidz great success





the total top end of our skills was a great level for expert play, so *Robotron* was hard yet accessible to many players."

LOOKING GOOD

With all the AI and gameplay mechanics in place, it was simply a matter of continually improving *Robotron*'s aesthetics. Thanks to the speedy 1MHz graphics processor, everything was moving along at a dazzling rate; now it was time to define each character and add *Robotron*'s boisterous spot effects.

"It's funny," begins Jarvis. "To today's player *Robotron*'s graphics are laughably simplistic, but they were state of the art in 1982. The non-rotating, squarish, straight-on-view robots gave a very clean and aesthetic look – actually quite robotic, making the style very iconic. The sounds were all live computer synthesized effects of amazing depth. Pink and white noise, as well as FM, pulse width modulation and wave table synthesis were just a few of the techniques we used. Incredibly, the sound system was one monophonic channel, but by using a highly refined priority scheme where the most important event takes precedence, no-one ever noticed. Although most players still swear they hear several sounds at once…"

There's no denying that *Robotron*'s aesthetics and intense gameplay made it stand out, but as with Jarvis' previous titles, it was the unique control system that you first noticed. After Jarvis had finished work on *Stargate* he was involved in a car accident that shattered his right hand. At the time his favourite game was *Berzerk* and his injury made it practically impossible for him to play his beloved game.

"I loved *Berzerk* but it was very frustrating having to move towards an enemy you wanted to shoot, especially as holding the fire button down meant your player remained stationary," recalls Jarvis. "At that point I realised the solution was to fire with one joystick and move with another. It was such a basic idea that it was amazing it hadn't been done before. Today, of course, dual joysticks are standard on virtually all console systems."

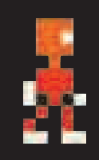
It may have been a novel control system, but it was typical of the approach that Jarvis took towards his games, and as he explains, it's all about making them as intuitive as they can be. "I've always felt that controls are a key element to make the human-machine interface as natural and free as possible," he says. "If the player has to think too much about how he's going to do something, then the game is lost. Also, you want to empower the player with a control that allows incredible freedom of movement, yet is simple to use. Complete contradictions."

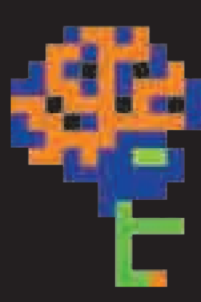
Contradictions aside, *Robotron* proved extremely successful when it was released in 1982 and, as with *Defender*, it attracted some seriously dedicated gamers. "You cannot play a casual game [of *Robotron*] as it demands your everything," says Jarvis. "You've got to survive… kill or be killed. The player's mind is cleansed of all distractions and *Robotron* takes over."

Despite this toughness there was plenty to draw players back. While Waves were completed by killing all the onscreen Robotrons the real points were amassed by consecutively collecting as many stranded humans as possible. This proved a challenge too, though. Did you try to collect that woman for 1,000 extra points, or were you content to finish off the remaining Robotrons? It's the perfect example of risk versus reward and proves that Jarvis' game wasn't just another shooter.

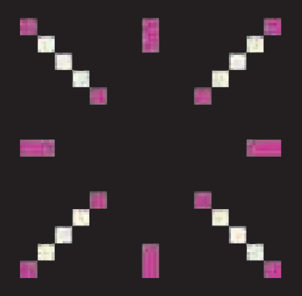
"That was a key element of *Robotron*'s design, and it kept the player in total cognitive

"FROM A GAME DESIGN PERSPECTIVE THE SET-UP WITH ROBOTRON WAS TO ESSENTIALLY TAKE SPACE INVADERS INTO TWO DIMENSIONS"

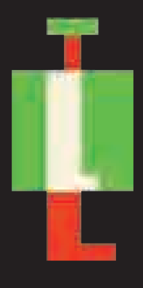




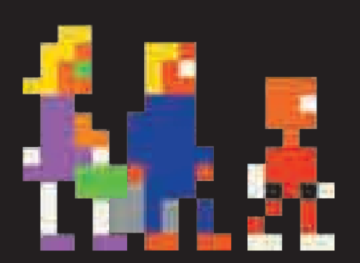
BRAINS
This gruesome-looking foe first appears on Wave 5 and fires deadly missiles. It can also turn downed humans into deadly Progs that race towards you at an alarming rate.



QUARKS
While the Spheroids are quite content to fire Enforcers at you, the Quarks go one better and launch deadly tanks that will fire bombs or try to run you over.



HULKS
These indestructible monstrosities unerringly track down any nearby humans and kill them. While you can't destroy them, they can be slowed with laser fire.



THE FAMILY
The last family on earth consists of Mommy, Daddy and Mikey. There are bloody thousands of them though, so collect as many pixel people as you can.

dissonance at all times," confirms Jarvis. "At each millisecond the player must recalculate an optimal strategy evaluating the risk of dying versus the point gain of rescuing humans versus the value of killing off the enemy versus the value of fleeing and so on. This is what makes *Robotron* much more of a tactical and strategic game than merely a twitch-fest. Great *Robotron* players are able to intuit the best strategic decisions and execute them in real time."

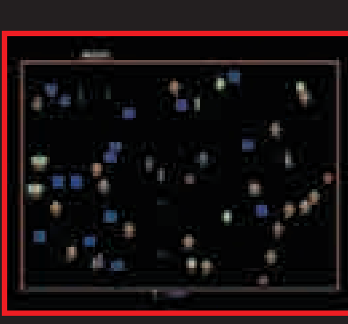
KEEP GOING

With the success of the original game it was inevitable that similar games would appear, and while 2D titles such as *Smash TV* managed to re-create some of *Robotron*'s original flair, the 3D variations were a different story… "The hardware limitations of early 3D systems handicapped a lot of pioneering efforts like *Robotron X*," admits Jarvis. "Besides, making a sequel of *Robotron* is like making a sequel of any great classic like *Tetris* or *Pac-Man*. The games are so perfect in their original 2D environments that in making the move to 3D the odds are that you're going to screw it up. An obvious choice would be to take the original game mechanic and execute it with 3D graphics but from the third-person perspective. This would look very modern but reserve the gameplay magic."

While Jarvis says that this is what he tried to achieve with *Smash TV*, he acknowledges that it wasn't a "true sequel". So how would he go about making a follow-up to *Robotron*? "If I were to take up the sequel gauntlet, I would try to implement my original concept for the game, which was never actually finished," he says. "*Robotron* was originally envisioned as a massive underground world of corridors, control rooms, reprogramming rooms and robot factories. I never got around to realising this vision in the original game, since the randomly structured open playfield proved so much fun to play." Jarvis may never have made a *Robotron* sequel, but when the original game remains so good it scarcely seems to matter. And although it's appeared on computers and compilations over the years, it's the recent Xbox version that Jarvis feels best captures the original game, but even he has reservations about it. "I like my joysticks nailed down to something heavy," he laughs. "If I play it too much I'll just end up ripping the damn controller apart…"

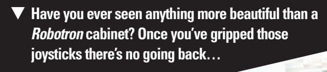
As if to prove Jarvis' preference for anchored joysticks, he's still working in the arcade industry, this time for his own company, Raw Thrills, Inc. In recent years it's produced games such as *The Fast And The Furious*, but you can bet that even if people are still playing those games in 25 years, *Robotron: 2084* will still be going strong 50 years after its release.

> "YOU'VE GOT TO SURVIVE - KILL OR BE KILLED. THE PLAYER'S MIND IS CLEANSED OF ALL DISTRACTIONS AND ROBOTRON TAKES OVER"









▼ Have you ever seen anything more beautiful than a *Robotron* cabinet? Once you've gripped those joysticks there's no going back…

Includes 8 retro-racing classics!

MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 3

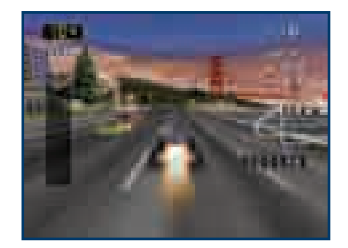
With two retro compilations under its belt, Midway's taken a new direction with its third old-school outing. Whereas the earlier Arcade Treasures titles were mixed bags, Midway Arcade Treasures 3 is all about the driving. Another notable difference is that this disc only contains eight games compared to the previous outings' 20 or so titles. Is Midway going for quality over quantity? We'll see…

Format: Arcade
Price: £14.99
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Digital Eclipse/ GameStar



SAN FRANCISCO RUSH 2049

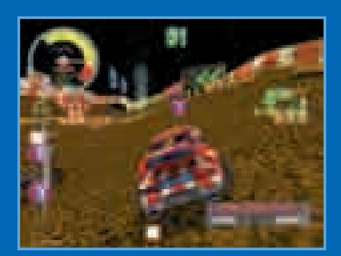
Don't be fooled by *Rush*'s so-so visuals and forgettable tunes – it's actually one of the most enjoyable titles on this compilation. Of course, enjoyable doesn't necessarily mean amazing, and while it's good fun it isn't without its faults. Handling is extremely hit and miss and you'll often find yourself slamming mindlessly into walls when all you wanted to do was take a sharp turn; you get used to it with a little practice, but it's amazing how often this problem crops up throughout the compilation's other games. *Rush* features a wealth of options and provides a decent adrenaline shot. If the handling was as polished as the rest of the game, Midway would have had a real winner on its hands.



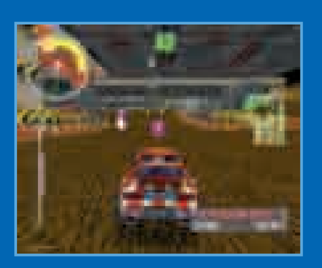
◀ That bridge that looks vaguely like the Golden Gate Bridge proves you're really in San Francisco.

OFF ROAD THUNDER: MUD, SWEAT 'N' GEARS

After the success of water-based racer *Hydro Thunder*, Midway took the franchise onto four wheels and the result was a fairly decent racer. As with the *Rush* games, there's a ton of options and the persistent gamer will find plenty to keep them busy. But while *Off Road Thunder* (we'll forget the silly second part of the name) is certainly fun, it does get rather bland and doesn't have the lasting appeal of the superior *Hydro Thunder*. It's certainly a nice addition to the compilation but it's yet another racer that doesn't really have enough in it to separate it from the *Rush* titles that Midway has already included. Oh, and once again the controls are all over the place…



▲ Now this is how you're meant to drive a 4x4 – round a dirt track with a bit of rough and tumble…



▲ … Do you think there's 'clog up the town centre' level? Of course not. Get back on the mud, fools!



▲ In case you were wondering what a post-apocalyptic race track looked like, this is it.

BADLANDS

What could be better than *Super Sprint*? Why, *Super Sprint* with guns of course. Anyone who's already played *Super Sprint* and *Championship Sprint* on the earlier *Arcade Treasures* collections will know exactly what to expect with this apocalyptic take on the series as it suffers from exactly the same problems as its predecessors.

While the graphics and sound are absolutely bang-on, the controls are once again incredibly twitchy and take a fair while to get used to. There's nothing worse than tearing away from the pack and suddenly finding you've taken a turn too tight because the analogue stick is too sensitive. But if you can forgive its shortcomings you'll find *Badlands* to be an enjoyable racer and one you'll return to more than once.

RACE DRIVIN'

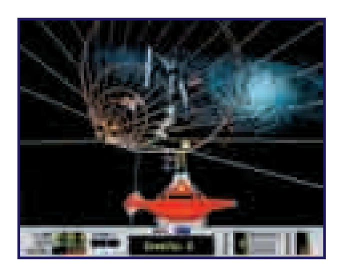
Oh dear. There's always a runt in any litter and in this case it's *Race Drivin'*. It may have been cutting edge 16 years ago, but the outdated visuals, stupidly complicated control system and dull gameplay mean *Race Drivin'* is little more than filler for this disc. What's most surprising is that *Race Drivin'* should be a lot of fun; after all, it features loop-the-loops, steep jumps and all sorts of obstacles. So it's a shame that the deathly dull pace and fiddly controls can't deliver what the game promises. We'd say stick with the original but that's rubbish as well.

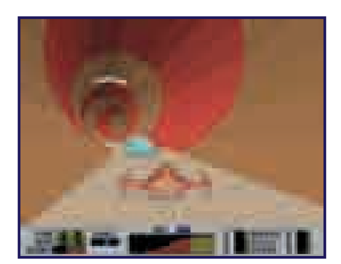




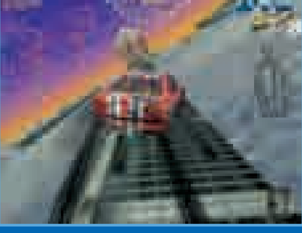
S.T.U.N. RUNNER

The original *S.T.U.N. Racer* was a real gem and we've lost count of the number of ten pences we pumped into it. Sadly, that addiction won't be resurfacing as this conversion is horrendous. Not only does everything run too fast, the game also suffers from the twitchy controls that plague most of the titles on this compilation. There's nothing worse than belting around the perfectly replicated tunnels only to find that the dud controls mean you keep whizzing past any power-ups you're aiming for. It's incredibly frustrating to play and after a few turns you'll have little reason to return to it.





SAN FRANCISCO RUSH THE ROCK: ALCATRAZ EDITION

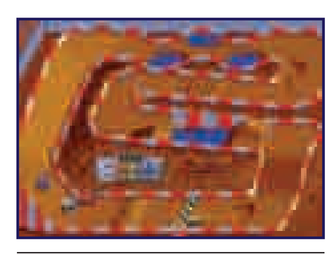


▲ As a method of escaping Alcatraz this isn't very subtle. And problematic when you hit the water…

Though *Rush The Rock* suffers from exactly the same issues as the *San Francisco Rush* conversion, we still found ourselves going back to it. There's a huge amount of gameplay options and you'll constantly discover new routes and short-cuts as you race around the island. The cheesy rock soundtrack and annoying sound effects tend to grate and the visuals have lost a lot of their original sheen, but *Rush The Rock* remains a fun racer. As with *Hydro Thunder*, realism goes out the window and you're simply left with an enjoyable title that's resoundingly good fun to play.

SUPER OFF ROAD & SPECIAL BONUS TRACKS

We're huge fans of *Super Off Road* on the SNES, so we were itching to play what should have been a superior arcade version. Sadly, we were in for quite a shock as the little SNES beats its bigger brother in nearly every department. The weedy tunes on offer aren't a patch on those found in the SNES version, and while the graphics are undeniably crisper the arcade outing suffers in the all-important gameplay stakes. Yes, you've guessed it, as with *Badlands*, *Super Off Road*'s controls take an age to get used to. They're made worse by the fact that the nitro boost and undulating tracks are an absolute nightmare to get your head round. To add insult to injury Midway has included the Track Pak that gives you eight new tracks and the option to drive buggies or trucks. But they're no better than the main game. Thanks but no thanks.



▲ That course seems far more suited to bikes than cars. Where's *Kick Start* and Peter Purves, eh?

▲ It may not look like it but that *is* water you're racing on. Not just blue carpet.

HYDRO THUNDER

Hydro Thunder is by far the greatest title on Midway's latest compilation and features impressive visuals, incredibly hectic racing and a lasting challenge – in short, everything you'd want from a good racer. It may not be as vibrant as the Dreamcast version but there's an incredible amount going on and you'll soon find your eyes wandering away from the hectic racing in order to take in everything else – killer whales plough through ice water, monkeys swing from trees and tour boats sail into your path. Add some impressive water physics and it's a tantalising package.

The gameplay is solid as well and you'll soon discover a wealth of short-cuts and some gripping level design. Best of all, the handling is pretty much identical to the original game and makes a mockery of the other games here. *Hydro Thunder* is a great title and easily worth the asking price alone. Well, it would be if you couldn't pick up the Dreamcast version for a fiver…

THE VERDICT

It was perhaps inevitable that Midway would slip up eventually. Considering the control issues with racing games on the previous *Arcade Treasures* it was no surprise to see the same problems again. It's all very well having games that are near identical to the arcade versions but when you can't perfectly emulate the original controls or gameplay then is it worth bothering? While the prospect of a fourth *Arcade Treasures* isn't entirely unwelcome, it would have to dramatically improve on the standard of this collection.

52%





Those expecting an armour-clad gastropod are going to be severely disappointed…

Release: 1996
Format: Neo-Geo AES/MVS
Publisher: SNK
Developer: Nazca Corporation

Considering how many beat-'em-up franchises are available for the Neo-Geo, it's good to see that the spectacularly shooty *Metal Slug* series is still going strong after nearly a decade. First released in 1996, *Metal Slug* set a new benchmark for the run-and-gun genre and delivered scorching visuals, tight level design and horribly addictive gameplay. While many veterans of the series feel that the later games (noticeably *4* and *5*) lost their way somewhat, the early *Slug*s are still excellent blasters and remain wonderfully crafted games that are perfect for those after a quick adrenaline rush.

As with many games of its ilk, *Metal Slug*'s storyline was little more than an excuse to set up the all-important blasting that took place across the game's six action-packed levels. Bad guy Morden was hell bent on world devastation and it was down to two soldiers, Marco and Tarma, to cut him down to size (and no doubt save the world in the process). Luckily, the two friends had access to a devastating array of weaponry – given to them by prisoners of war that they saved – that ranged from heavy machine guns to huge rocket launchers. While later games introduced all sorts of weird and wacky artillery, it never felt as balanced as that seen in the original *Metal Slug*.

While Marco and Tarma were obviously the game's heroes it was the titular Metal Slug that was the true star. It may have looked like a super-deformed tank but the Slug was a deadly killing machine and packed a devastating punch. Armed with a limited supply of cannons and an awesome laser-spewing turret that enabled you to fire in any direction, the Slug was a work of art and made short work of anything that got in way thanks to its handy ability to jump over or duck under objects; hardly sensible, but incredibly enjoyable to watch.

And that's one of *Metal Slug*'s greatest charms – it was able to mix the realistic with the downright absurd and convince the player that it was nothing out of the ordinary. Indeed, this juxtaposition continually cropped up throughout *Metal Slug* and is a major element of the franchise's success.

Of course, another important aspect of *Metal Slug* is just how damn great it still looks – something that's partly due to the amazing animation that Nazca was able to cram into *Slug*'s 193Mb cartridge. Even the staunchest defender of 3D gaming would be forced to reconsider their opinions on 'old-fashioned' 2D games after seeing *Metal Slug* in action. While it was superseded by later *Slugs*, Nazca's original incarnation remains a graphical tour de force that still manages to impress.

From its beautifully drawn backgrounds to its amazingly animated heroes, it's obvious that *Slug* was a real labour of love for everyone involved. Marco, Tarma and



▲ When you absolutely, positively got to kill every pixelly soldier in the room, only *Metal Slug* will do.

HOW MUCH?

Want Metal Slug? Best take out that second mortgage…

Metal Slug is one of the AES's most desirable titles and now fetches ridiculously high prices on the likes of eBay and various Neo-Geo forums. The original AES version regularly soars past the £1,000 mark, but there are cheaper alternatives. One method is to buy or make your own conversion (which can be created by swapping the relevant ROMs from an MVS cart of *Metal Slug* to a compatible AES board). Neo-Geo owners usually frown upon this method though, as it means that the surrogate AES cart is normally sacrificed. An even easier (though slightly more expensive method) is to simply buy a Supergun that can play the original MVS cartridges. Be warned though: many MVS bootlegs exist, so it's best to use respected buyers or well-known Neo-Geo sites such as www.neo-geo.com. Finally, *Metal Slug* is also available for the Saturn and PlayStation. While both titles aren't without their problems (mostly loading times and slowdown) you'll still see plenty of change from £100.



▲ It's a good laugh watching all your enemies arsing around, but you've got to admit that it's even more fun pumping them full of lead. Isn't it?

the Metal Slug are all animated superbly, and it's rare to see the same attention to detail given to more secondary characters. The game's enemies were just as impressively animated as *Slug*'s heroes and as you progressed deeper into the game their animation routines become even more exaggerated and outlandish (and very bloody if you were playing the Japanese version).

Slug's aim may well have been to deliver as much death and destruction as possible, but never had the objective been so much fun. Soldiers hilariously tried to creep up behind you on tiptoes, gingerly held their noses when their boats got capsized, or would simply try to flatten you with giant snowballs. When they weren't trying to end your life in a number of inventive ways you'd find them sunbathing in their underpants, sitting on the khazi or furiously bailing out of sinking ships. It was the little touches like these that made *Slug* immediately stand apart from other titles in the genre.

We could harp on about the antics of *Slug*'s comedy enemies forever, but its gameplay was just as important and became a benchmark for run-and-gun titles. As with its outstanding visuals, every part of *Slug*'s level design had been honed to perfection and the result was a meticulously crafted title that demanded to be played.

Despite its humorous tone, the franchise has always been furiously hard and the original *Slug* set the bar pretty high. From the off your reflexes are tested to their absolute limit and it wasn't uncommon for new players to have lost several credits by the end of the first level – and later stages didn't get any easier…



While initial enemy waves consisted of various platoons of soldiers and a smattering of tanks and helicopters, later stages saw all sorts of weird metallic contraptions enter the fray; by the time you reached level three you were fighting for literally every inch of ground covered.

Needless to say, the satisfaction you felt when you completed the later stages was immeasurable and spurred you on until either your lives or cash were exhausted. It's a testament to *Slug*'s superb design that you never felt cheated when you were robbed of a life. Indeed, few shooters are as expertly paced as *Metal Slug* and it's a fact that becomes especially apparent when you face off against each level's impressive bosses. Thanks to some well-thought out attack patterns and that stunning animation, each one was a joy to confront and would take an astonishing amount of hits before it finally succumbed to your firepower.

Whether you were flying solo or were lucky enough to be joined by a friend for some hectic two-player action, *Metal Slug* was a terrific game that's still great today. In fact, we can think of only one problem: the price. Our poor wallets…

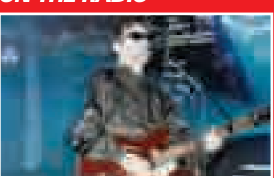
OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1996

AT THE MOVIES



Trainspotting not only introduced legions of cinema-goers to the hellish visions of cold turkey, it also turned Ewan McGregor into a bona fide movie star. From junkie to Jedi in eight short years – "impressive, most impressive…"

ON THE RADIO



The Lightning Seeds had been bordering on the cusp of greatness for ages, but it was their collaboration with Frank Skinner and David Baddiel on football anthem *Three Lions* that gave them their biggest hit.

FASHION VICTIM



They may have been bulky, suffered from poor reception and lacked the abilities that many now take for granted, but mobile phones really took off in 1996. *The X-Files* wouldn't have been the same without them…

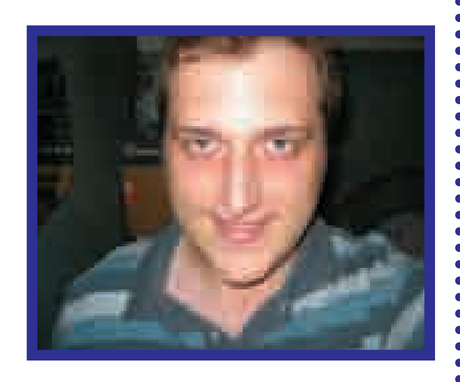
ON THE BOX



Everyone's favourite ginger celebrity created a new style of chat show in 1996. During its four-year run, *TFI Friday* specialised in chatting to the stars when they were at their hottest and claims full responsibility for getting Samuel L Jackson his *Star Wars* gig. The show also got Channel 4 into trouble over Shaun Ryder's four-letter outbursts at tea time.

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

IT'S NOT VERY OFTEN WE FIND READERS WITH EXTENSIVE JAPANESE COLLECTIONS, SO WE WERE DELIGHTED WHEN ADRIAN WHEELAN DECIDED TO SHARE HIS COLLECTION WITH US. THE 28-YEAR-OLD LEGAL CLERK FROM SURREY HAS AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF TITLES AND WAS MORE THAN HAPPY TO TALK US THROUGH SOME OF HIS FAVOURITES…



Q) How did you first become interested in videogames?

AW: Playing *Snapper* and *Arcadians* on the Acorn Electron during computer lessons at school drew me into games. It was paid employment that enabled me to start collecting them.

Q) How long have you been collecting?

AW: I've been picking up games on and off for the last 17 years now, but it's only been over the past two that I've seriously started collecting them.

Q) So why the interest in all the Japanese Mega Drive titles?

AW: It was my first import machine. Memories of cramped dingy import stores, groups huddled around the latest hallowed release, silence save for jaws hitting the floor and groans at the prices. Nice cover art too.

Q) Do they tend to be more expensive than their PAL counterparts and will you buy games that you can't understand (such as RPGS)?

AW: In general the prices are very comparable, and often as cheap as the PAL versions, if not cheaper – as is the case for most of the RPGs. There are always exceptions, of course. A lot of the later titles sell for silly money compared to their PAL counterparts – PAL *Comix Zone* or *Ooze* can be had for around £1, whereas you'll be lucky to get change from £100 for the Japanese equivalents. I'm actually going for the full set of Japanese MD games, so I do buy many games I can't understand because of the language issue. Fortunately, most are very cheap and the best ones are nearly always released in Europe or the US anyway, so I can usually get by fine.

Q) Many of your games are still sealed. Why buy titles you're not going to play?

AW: I have two sides to my videogame collecting. One is collecting to play, the other is collecting to collect, and that's where the passion for sealed items comes in. If anything, it's the ultimate compliment I can pay a certain game and any sealed item I have is almost guaranteed to be a personal favourite.

Q) Some people are criticised for the lengths they go to for their collection. Have you ever felt the need to defend your hobby?

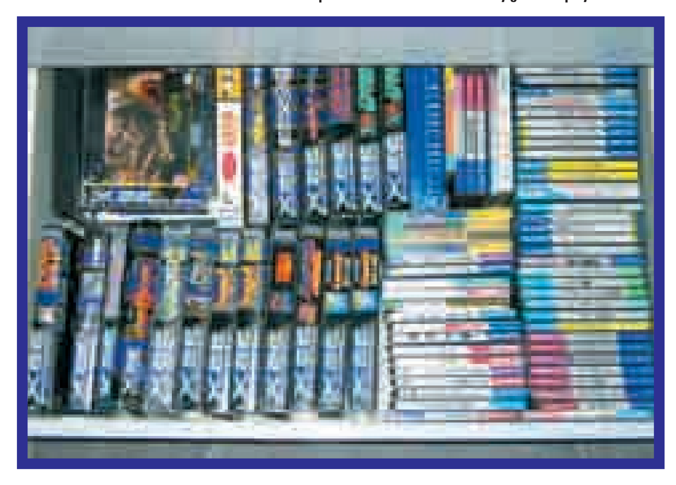
AW: Not really. Sometimes it might raise the odd

▼ How many boxes? We guess some of you are lucky enough to have room to store such things in mint condition…



▼ A wall full of Japanese Mega Drive boxes – enough to make us drool like mental dogs.

▼ Just because the 32X turned out to be a bit of a flop doesn't mean there weren't any games to play on it.



▼ Plenty of games, but how does he sleep in that bed? Giving up your bed for games is noble but daft.



eyebrow or draw the occasional sarcastic comment, but that's natural whenever somebody displays a certain level of passion for anything. I respect the lengths others go to for hobbies that aren't to my liking, and merely ask for the same in return. If people can't give that at least, then I feel no need to defend my passions anyway.

Q) Do you tend to buy rare games even if they aren't very good? If so, why do it? Is it as a future investment?

AW: Guilty as charged, although I never tend to buy rare titles as a future investment. Rarity per se is never an issue for me, and the perceived quality of the game only comes into play for certain items. Generally my less common items are bought to fulfil various criteria of my collection: I buy Japanese Acclaim MD releases – by and large, very expensive and poor games – as I want the full set; I buy sealed PC Engine games for titles I love and if they happen to be rare, expensive or generally held to be poor games so be it.

I certainly think it's pointless to buy rarer games as an investment, unless it is a one-of-a-kind item. Rare games have plummeted in value for various reasons many times – *Circus Lido* on the PC Engine used to fetch hundreds of pounds until boxes of copies were found. More recently I know of people who paid over £800 for *Delisoba Deluxe*, now £300 is probably a little high. Also, the whole economics of supply and demand is a major factor – just because an item is rare doesn't mean anybody actually wants it. I don't think another European copy of *Kizuna Encounter* would fetch over $10,000 on the market now.

Q) What's your favourite console to collect for and why?

AW: Easily the PC Engine. All the other consoles I like are easy to collect for. With enough money anyone could amass a very solid Saturn, Neo-Geo or Mega Drive collection in no time, PCE collecting is different as availability is very often the key issue – just finding certain games for sale is hard, finding them in good complete condition near impossible. It's great fun tracking down titles, following up leads, the lows of a collapsed deal, the highs of a great score.

PCE collectors seem to be remarkably interesting people too. And then there are the games, of course. So many top-quality conversions, so many PCE-only games. I'm also a bit of a hardware junkie and the vast array of console iterations and accessories is staggering. In short, the perfect console as far as I am concerned.

Q) What's the most treasured part of your collection?

AW: I genuinely love it all, as every item brings a smile to my face. That said, should some disaster ever befall my collection tears would be spilt over the loss of my *Flashback* (Japanese Mega Drive) and *Gunstar Heroes* demo cart (Japanese Mega Drive) above all else.

Q) Tell us a little more about your Lynx collection. Sounds like you've got a few oddities in there…

AW: I've always had a soft spot for the Lynx and it's interesting to see just how much more it had to offer – *Alien Vs Predator* is graphically stunning (for a Lynx game). None of them are original protos, just EPROM's of various Lynx games that got canned at some stage of development, or homebrew releases. There's also a thriving homebrew Lynx scene too, and I like to give this my support, albeit tacitly.

Q) How many complete collections of games do you have and what machines are particularly easy to collect for?

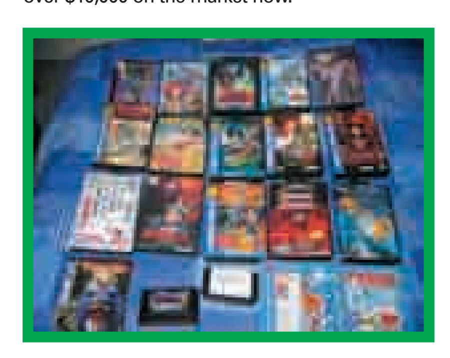
AW: I have complete collections for the Neo-Geo CD, UK Neo-Geo Pocket Color, PAL 32X, SuperGrafx, and my Japanese Mega Drive collection will soon be completed. I'd say they were all easy to collect for save for one or two titles on each that can prove very hard to find.

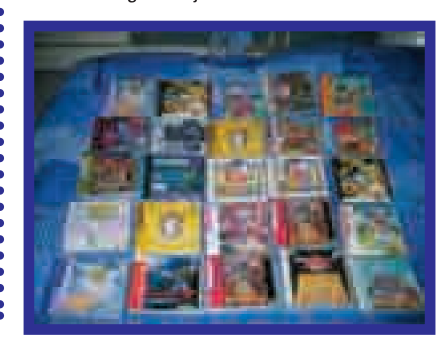
Q) Where do you buy most of your games? We take it the high street isn't your first port of call.

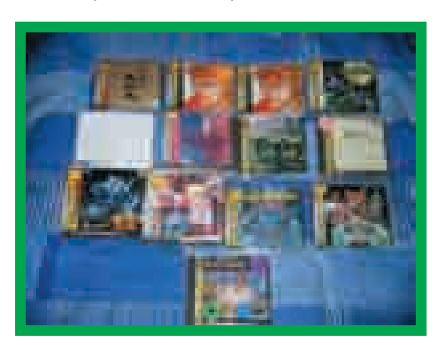
AW: I started off mostly buying games on eBay and through there was able to build up a few steady contacts. Now I pretty much get all my games from contacts, friends in Japan or Yahoo Japan auctions, as I buy Japanese titles almost exclusively.

Q) What do your family think of your hobby?

AW: Not a great deal apart from raised eyebrows. The old man is a dedicated cinema enthusiast, taking up a good third of the house with his stuff, so the family is used to 'obsessive bores with boxes of junk all over the place'.









Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

STICK IT TO 'EM

Dear games™

The PSP emulation scene is really hotting up, but I'm annoyed that Sony has decided to force us to update the firmware to play the latest games. I understand why it's happening, and in many ways it makes sense, but does Sony not realise that there is a tremendous appeal for us retro heads of being able to stick all our old favourites on one memory stick and take gaming history around with us?

Sony is closing off a potentially huge market, just to stop a few low-lives playing pirated current-generation games off the memory stick. Wake up, Sony – give the consumers what they want.

Lee Finch

Ah, but let's not forget that even playing old games – no matter how well they may be emulated – on your PSP is still illegal and you can't really blame Sony for taking its current stance. Still, if there's one thing we have learnt it's that you'll never be able to fully stop those pesky pirates; updating the firmware will simply slow them down for a while.



Want to play *Street Fighter* on your PSP? Don't we all?

PAD PROBLEMS

Dear games™

I'd like to talk about *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*, probably two of the greatest first-person shooters ever created (and yes, I've played *Deus Ex*, *Half-Life* and *Halo 2*). Each game features a superb multiplayer mode and I've even gone as far as to recreate them for *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* (although, admittedly, they're not exactly the same).

While I'd love to go back and play both *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark* again there's the whole controller issue to consider. I wonder what the hell was going through the heads of the designers at Nintendo when they came up with a controller that became completely useless after just six months of use? Would you guys know of any places that sell new sticks or replacement parts? I've found the analogue stick replacement on Lik-Sang but they're always out of stock.

Oh, and is there any chance of a retro article on either game in the near future?

Grindie

Glad to hear you're still enjoying *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*. We'll definitely be covering both games in a future issue of the magazine, but you may not like what we write about them – while we appreciate that both games were once landmark titles, they've both aged rather poorly (particularly *GoldenEye*). Titles like *Marathon* or *Doom* are much better examples. As for your controller issue, your best bet is to try eBay as it often has brand new pads at decent prices.



Too tough for the controller? Now that's a real man's game.

NOT BASTARDS

Dear games™

I'm a bit worried about one of your monthly features, namely 'The Bastard Son Of…'.
I don't have a problem with the name or anything like that, I just think that you're being overly harsh on the excellent *Shinobi* franchise. You've only written four or five articles but have already covered two *Shinobi* titles – *Shadow Dancer* for the arcade and the Saturn's *Shinobi X*.

If you're really going to kick the franchise then why not mention the atrocious *Cyber Shinobi* that appeared on the Master System? That game was bloody terrible yet you hardly mention it in either article. I demand justice, or I'll slay you with my ninja sword.

The Master

That's a fair point. However, we stand firm and truly believe that *Shadow Dancer* and *Shinobi X* aren't a patch on the original *Shinobi*, and judging by the responses we've received, so do many of our readers. Still, we'll consider laying off *Shinobi* in the future and will look elsewhere to vent our gaming spleen.

I LIKE 'EM BIG

Dear games™

Is it just me or has gaming become much more impersonal than it used to be? Maybe it's due to









STAR LETTER

Dear games™
What's your view when it comes to mobile phone gaming? It would seem that they're a good choice for the discerning retro gamer, as the catalogue of games available is growing every day.

In some ways it could be argued that retro gaming is, in fact, further ingrained into the mainstream consciousness than current-gen gaming; a lot of people – of both sexes and all ages – are playing games on their phones.

So what I want to know is, are you comfortable with the masses swallowing up the retro scene? Seeing youngsters on their phones enjoying *Pac-Man* and the like – have they paid their retro dues?
Stephen Baker

To be honest, we see mobile retro games as a mixed blessing. While we're obviously pleased that retro gaming has found yet another way into the mainstream, we've yet to play a single title that actually works well on these new platforms. So is it really a good thing that gamers are getting to play titles that aren't a patch on the original versions? Could this be damaging for the retro scene as people are misled about the quality of old games? We have no problem with everyone enjoying retro games regardless of age – to do so would smack of gaming elitism – but we think that introducing gamers to shoddy versions of great titles is a missed opportunity. You've opened up quite a debate… treat yourself to a game

the fact that games are printed on cheap, flimsy discs. I remember saving up for games and really feeling that I was receiving great value for money (especially when they were costing me £50 a pop). Having a flimsy little disc in your hand is no substitute for a chunky N64 or NES cartridge.
Jamie Perriam

PS. I don't know how these things work, but if my thoughts miraculously make it as the Star Letter, I'd dearly like *Shadows Of The Empire* for N64. Cheers.

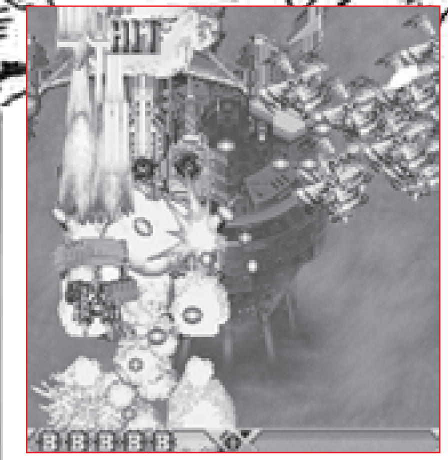
A word to the wise: never, ever ask for Star Letter, as you'll automatically not receive it on principle. Still, we do have to agree with you – it certainly doesn't feel like you're getting a lot for your hard-earned cash nowadays. Where are the lovely chunky Mega Drive cases we used to own? Why are PC games no longer sold in massive, Amiga-style boxes? And why can you no longer buy those computers with the valves in them…?



SHMUP UP!

Dear games™
What's your obsession with all these bloody shoot-'em-ups – I abhor referring to them as shmups – that you keep covering? It seems that not an issue goes by when you're not harping on about *Radiant Silvergun*, *R-Type* or God knows what else and I for one am getting mighty tired of it.

Everyone knows that shoot-'em-ups are incredibly dull to look at and require virtually no skill to play, so why not stop covering them? Platform games are a much better genre and feature plenty of classics such as the Sonic and Mario franchises. I'd much rather read about *Sonic The Hedgehog* than a weird Japanese shooter that I'll probably never ever play.
Roger Smith



Boring, eh? Look at all the colours, man! Not boring at all…

Sorry, but the shoot-'em-ups will be staying. Yes, they do get a fair bit of coverage but our Retro Ed is a huge fan of such things and, contrary to what you claim, shoot-'em-ups do require vast amounts of skill to play – we've seen some feats of manual dexterity that would put most *Krypton Factor* contestants to shame. And look, just to keep you happy we didn't call them shmups once. Oh…

RECOLLECT-OVISION

Dear games™
I might've missed it (or my memory is playing tricks on me), but have you done a feature on the Colecovision yet? It's a console that I know very little about and I've only just realised that games are still being made for it. I've seen the odd mention of it here and there, but never a full-blown feature.
Ryan

Don't worry, you're not going mad – we simply haven't managed to find time to fit a suitable article into the section. Rest assured that as soon as a slot comes along we'll be covering the Colecovision properly. In the meantime, look out for other 'Hardware Legend' features about long-lost consoles and computers.











It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-30



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£70-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£50-100
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£50-150
Super Grafx	£200-300



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£10-200 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-40
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-40
Mega Drive	£10-20
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to go for. Hopefully, we can help.

Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of classic games. Of course, these are subject to change, so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). With Sega's *Sonic Gems Collection* on the way we thought it would be the ideal time to look at some of the games in their original incarnations…



Sonic The Hedgehog: Pocket Adventure

System: Neo-Geo Pocket Color
Estimated Price: £10-20

Never mind the fact that's it's too easy – Sonic's first colour handheld game is amazingly playable. The ability to link up to a second machine is a nice touch, but our favourite extra is the ability to collect puzzle pieces and build pictures. The presentation's of a high standard too, which is nice.



Sonic Adventure

System: Dreamcast
Estimated Price: £1.50-5

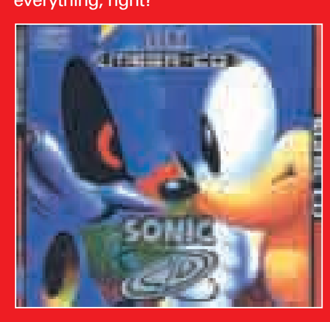
Sonic Adventure was the first 'traditional *Sonic*' outing in 3D and still takes your breath away. While the adventure sections are rather basic, the action stages are typically *Sonic* and work rather well. We could do without the annoying voices, and the camera can be a little hit and miss, but we'd still choose *Sonic Adventure* over *Sonic Heroes* any time.



Sonic CD

System: Mega CD
Estimated Price: £15-30

Sonic's first CD-based adventure was superb fun and featured everything a *Sonic* fan could ask for. The level design was wonderfully tight, the music (depending on which region you had) was absolutely fantastic and the gameplay was as good as ever. Granted, the cheesy animated intro was annoying but hey, you can't have everything, right?



Sonic & Knuckles

System: Mega Drive
Estimated Price: £7-20

While *Sonic & Knuckles* was a superb game in its own right, plugging in the previous three *Sonic* titles released the cartridge's potential, joining the games and increasing their lifespan with clever gameplay features. It's hard to find *Sonic & Knuckles* in good condition due to its cardboard casing.



Sonic The Hedgehog 2

System: Mega Drive
Estimated Price: 50p-£4

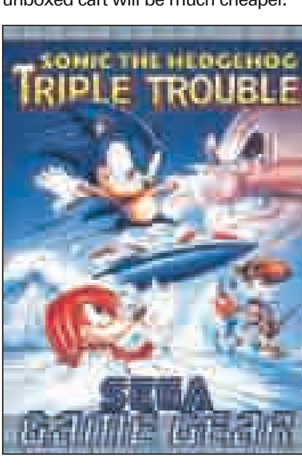
Using a mantra of 'bigger, faster, more', Sonic Team upped the action and delivered everything you'd expect for Sonic's first sequel. Improved visuals and great gameplay additions (including the excellent two-player mode and gob-smacking bonus stage) ensured that *Sonic 2* was a hit. Best of all, it's cheap as frites on eBay, so what are you waiting for?



Sonic Triple Trouble

System: Game Gear
Estimated Price: £15-30

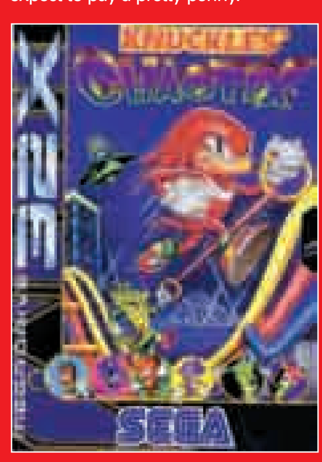
Sega may have released a slew of *Sonic* games for its Game Gear but few could match *Triple Trouble*'s charms. Features like Sonic's jet pack and Tails' submarine added plenty of depth to the standard *Sonic* gameplay and the graphics and sound were very impressive. Expect to pay a fair amount for a mint copy, though an unboxed cart will be much cheaper.



Knuckles' Chaotix

System: 32X
Estimated Price: £30-60

Many believe that *Knuckles' Chaotix* started off as a Mega Drive prototype, but Sega realised it needed a Sonic-themed game for its new 32X and moved development to that machine. While the main *Sonic* dynamics had been changed (your characters were linked by a chain) there's no denying that *Chaotix* is a great platformer. It's also extremely hard to track down so expect to pay a pretty penny.



Sonic R

System: Sega Saturn
Estimated Price: £10-20

Considering 3D was never the Saturn's strong point, Sonic Team made *Sonic R* look pretty special. Each level was filled with fancy effects and the result was a gorgeous racer that still impresses. Thanks to being a later Saturn release *Sonic R* comes in a nice plastic box so you can be sure that your copy won't fall apart when it gets sent through the post.





ROBOTRON (Arcade) Williams, 1982 – Original arcade flyer


eMag

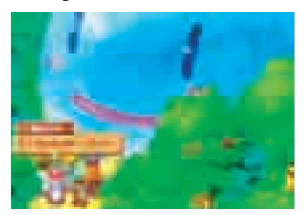
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



ATELIER IRIS: ETERNAL MANA

Sometimes, it pays to stick at an RPG – particularly in *Atelier Iris'* case when the slightly bland opening gives way to a deep and absorbing adventure. Sure, so it's not incredibly complicated or full of figures, but does that matter?



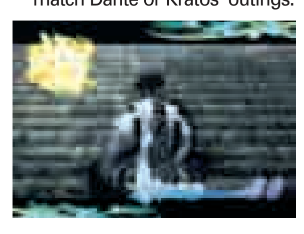
TECHNIC BEAT

We're kings when it comes to rhythm action so it's no shock to hear how much we enjoy *Technic Beat*. Admittedly, it takes a bit of getting used to – after *Amplitude*, everything seems a little out of place – but even so, you can't really complain for just $20.



GENJI

You've got to hand it to Game Republic – it's created a gorgeous looking game in *Genji*. Unfortunately, the depth just isn't up to the level of the graphics and while you'll certainly enjoy the time you spend with it, it can't match Dante or Kratos' outings.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

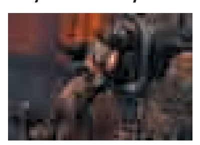
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	Hard as nails but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
God Of War	Sony	In-House	Sony's answer to *Devil May Cry* is a godly delight
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Gitaroo Man	THQ	Koei	The genuine thing of rhythm-action beauty
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Minna Daisuki Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	Just as quirky as the original, which makes it brilliant
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House	Flawed genius, but genius nevertheless
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	The original still reigns for style and substance.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

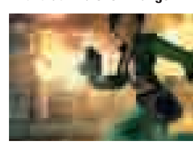
Amplitude
Finally, after months of hard work and blisters, we earned our *Amplitude* halo. Our lives are now complete.



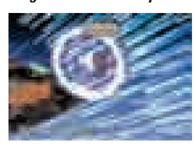
God Of War
We're also getting closer and closer to cracking God mode here… but sometimes it can just be incredibly unfair.



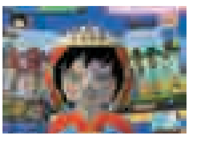
Beyond Good & Evil
Oh, that ending… How on Earth can Ubisoft possibly tell us there'll never be a sequel with that kind of cliffhanger?



Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness
The first Nippon Ichi game to hit the West and also the best – although *Makai Kingdom* comes awfully close.



Gitaroo Man
Of course, with *Amplitude* now done and dusted, we have to turn our rhythm action attentions elsewhere…









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the upcoming Xbox 360, Microsoft has pledged to support the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

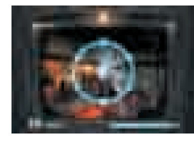
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House	No *GT4* comparisions – just a solid Xbox racing game
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	And about time too – a better version in almost every way
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine	Wonderfully unique and enjoyable, if a little short
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
RalliSport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House	The best *Splinter Cell* yet, thanks to the co-op mode
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	The greatest collection of fighting games ever? Oh, hell yes
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	An infinitely expanding universe of online blasting action

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

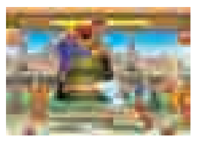
Chronicles Of Riddick
Vin Diesel doesn't do it for us, but this game does. A bit short but still incredibly satisfying all the way through.



Project Zero
Like a good scare, do you? Of course you do – and there's none finer on the Xbox than Tecmo's original frightener.



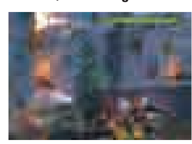
Street Fighter Anniversary
All those fighting games rolled into a single package; it's almost enough to make a hardened Ryu fan cry.



Ninja Gaiden
Tougher than a particularly tough pair of old boots, owned by Tough Jock McTough, the 1995 Mr Tough champion.



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
And you wonder why the games industry is falling apart. If you don't buy games like this, it'll never get better.

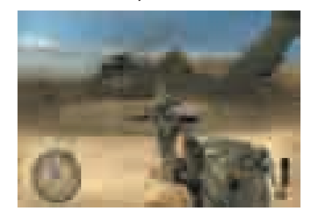






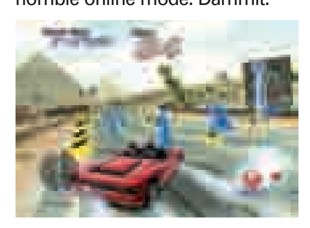
DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

How long has this been coming? We won't berate Novalogic for tardiness, but… well, it's been a while. Thankfully, the finished game isn't all that bad – it's not up to the standard of *Rainbow Six*, but it's certainly worth a look.



OUT RUN 2

Last month's excursion to the arcade to review *Out Run 2 SP* brought the memories flooding back, so we had to get Sega's Xbox original out of the cupboard. The result? A great single-player test of skill, marred by a really horrible online mode. Dammit.



GTA: SAN ANDREAS

We should point out that while some of the team are still making headway through *San Andreas*, recent play has been purely for the purposes of research. Hot Coffee? More like lukewarm Horlicks. We really don't see what all the fuss is about.



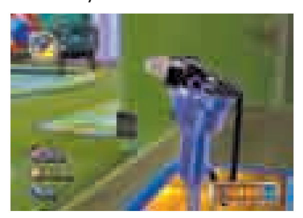
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



CHIBI-ROBO

How a small shiny object can be deemed as 'cute' is beyond us, but that's the case with *Chibi-Robo*. "Look! He's wearing a frog suit! And dancing around!" Cue hours of making the little guy run in circles until he falls over from battery exhaustion. Wonderful.



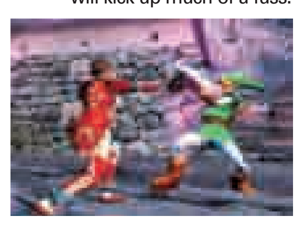
FAMICOMWARS DS

Yes, we're aware that this shouldn't be here, not being a GameCube game and all… but we just had to shout about how great *FamicomWars DS* is somewhere. The best thing is, it's due out over here at the end of September – start saving now.



SOUL CALIBUR II

We had the pleasure of playing the latest episode of the *Soul Calibur* legend this month, so back we went to see how the last one compares… and to be honest, there's not much difference. Still, we doubt anyone will kick up much of a fuss.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
WarioWare: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	Far better than its clueless detractors will have you believe

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

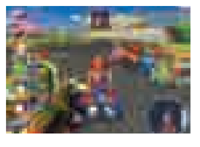
Alien Hominid
■ Why the GameCube version is the only one not to be out in the UK, we couldn't say – but it's the original and the best.



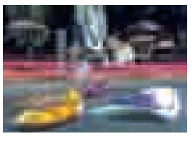
Viewtiful Joe 2
■ Nothing quite like a tough platform adventure to have you pulling your hair out on those long summer nights.



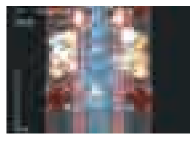
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!
■ Better get sharpening those *Mario Kart* skills for the launch of the DS version in November. We'll be waiting on the track.



F-Zero GX
■ Faster than a speeding bullet and twice as pretty; Sega did some fine work on this GameCube update.



Ikaruga
■ Even our resident shoot-'em-up expert says Treasure's blaster is one tough cookie… and he should know.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



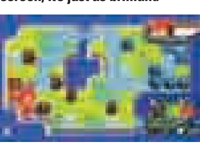
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

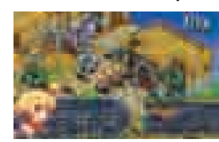
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

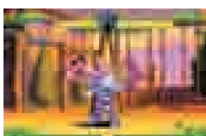
Advance Wars 2: BHR
Haven't got a DS? Then you really should think about getting this – bar the lack of a touch screen, it's just as brilliant.



Final Fantasy Tactics Advance
If you prefer your strategy games a little more fantastical though, there's always Square Enix's last *Tactics* effort to try.



Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper
Sometimes, though, it's less about the planning and more about the punching. Thank goodness they fitted *SF Alpha 3* onto the GBA.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



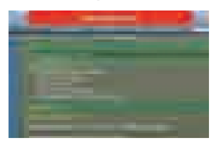
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	EA	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

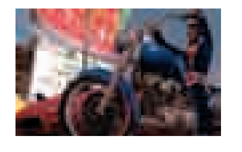
Football Manager 5
Sports Interactive goes it alone (well, alone from the franchise it built from scratch, anyway) and scores instantly. 'Goooaal' indeed.



World Of Warcraft
Blizzard's expansion of the game might have caused massive queues, but 1.5 million Chinese gamers can't be wrong.



GTA: San Andreas
Quick – get out there and grab yourself a PC version of Rockstar's classic. Just don't write to us about how rubbish Hot Coffee is.



PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

XPLODER MOVIE PLAYER

Console: PlayStation Portable
From: Blaze
Price: £19.99
Available: Out Now

You could have seen them coming a mile off – hordes of peripheral manufacturers, all determined to take their slice of the PSP media pie with their own media centre, movie player and file conversion software. As such, there are several alternatives out there but we'd have to say that Blaze's Xploder Movie Player offers the most for the media-hungry PSP owner. Sure, it's the cheapest option but it also has more functions to save you any hassles; not only does it make copying your music, photos and films to the PSP a matter of a few button presses, but it can also convert movie files into the MP4 format that the PSP reads, and even offers the ability to rip your own DVDs and CDs into useable MP3 and MP4 files, manage your save files, download cheat saves and more besides. It's the all-in-one package, and for that you can't really fault it – especially for the price.



MAX POWER STARTER KIT

PLAY FOR LONGER

Console: PlayStation Portable
From: Datel
Price: £34.99
Available: Out Now

Probably an obvious inclusion in this month's Essential Peripherals section, but with battery life still being one of the PSP's main flaws – at least when making regular use of the handheld's UMD drive – there's no doubt that an extra battery pack is a must-have for any PSP owner with long trips ahead of them. With that in mind, Datel's Max Power Starter Kit is a worthy purchase (despite the overly dramatic name), coming as it does with a spare battery and charger that can be used to keep one battery topped up while you're using the other, as well as an in-car power adapter for those non-battery-draining car journeys. According to Datel, the battery's Lithium-Polymer composition has advantages over the PSP's own Lithium-Ion technology, including longer life and safer use; for us though, just having a spare battery is enough of a reason to pick one up without all the technical jargon.



PSP VISOR EXTREME

Console: PlayStation Portable
From: Joytech
Price: £9.99
Available: Out Now

Now, call us cynical, but putting a word like 'extreme' on the end of a product that's essentially a piece of protective plastic does seem a little excessive. Even so, Joytech's invention does actually turn out to be an incredibly handy product underneath the slightly overzealous name. Attaching to the top of the PSP, the visor folds down across the front of the handheld to protect it from damage while in transit, then folds up to act as a sun visor during play. What's more, you can rotate it 180 degrees and fold the visor down across the back of the PSP, where it acts as an additional grip due to its raised surface, or by angling it outwards you can use it as a stand to prop the PSP up when watching movies. Four uses in one – not bad for a simple piece of shaped plastic, even if it really isn't that 'extreme'.

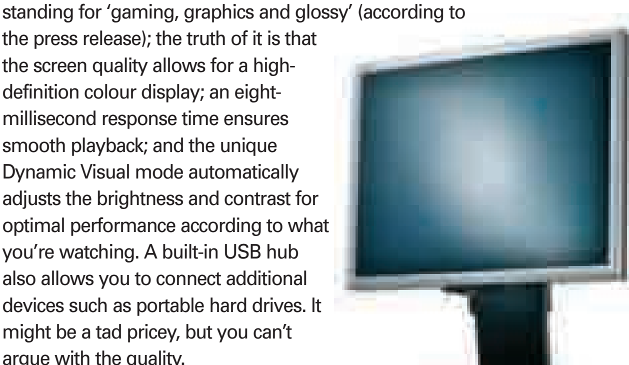


MULTISYNC LCD1970GX MONITOR

FOR GOOD-LOOKING GAMES

Console: PC
From: NEC
Price: £365 (plus VAT)
Available: Out Now

It's not all handhelds and PSPs in the videogame accessory world, you know – there are plenty of other quality items coming out. This monitor from NEC, for instance, might look like a regular flat LCD screen, but it's been designed with gaming in mind to ensure that users get the best out of it. Never mind the 'G' in the name standing for 'gaming, graphics and glossy' (according to the press release); the truth of it is that the screen quality allows for a high-definition colour display; an eight-millisecond response time ensures smooth playback; and the unique Dynamic Visual mode automatically adjusts the brightness and contrast for optimal performance according to what you're watching. A built-in USB hub also allows you to connect additional devices such as portable hard drives. It might be a tad pricey, but you can't argue with the quality.



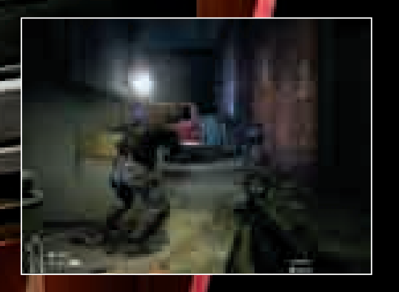
PLAY TO WIN

COME JOIN THE GAMES™ ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY – WE'VE LAID ON EVERYTHING YOU'LL NEED TO ENJOY SOME OF THE VERY BEST PC MULTIPLAYER TITLES AROUND

It's certainly been a hectic month on the **games**™ PC gaming servers – our decision to get you all shooting each other (and us) on *Battlefield 2* has clearly paid off. Even so, there's still enough room for those of you who haven't yet sampled the delights we have on offer, so now's the time to get involved. As always, we'll be shuffling the games around in the coming months (Vivendi's *F.E.A.R.* is already getting plenty of votes for inclusion) so enjoy what we've got while you can – it won't be here forever…

SWAT 4

Making a new entry onto **gamesTM01** is Vivendi's cop-busting FPS *SWAT 4*. We've set up some games of Barricaded Suspects (that's Team Deathmatch, to those who don't know), although Co-op mode will also be making an appearance.



COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

Still reigning supreme on the popularity list it's *Counter-Strike: Source* on **gamesTM02**, and to be honest, we can't blame you. Particularly since Valve introduced the new levels.

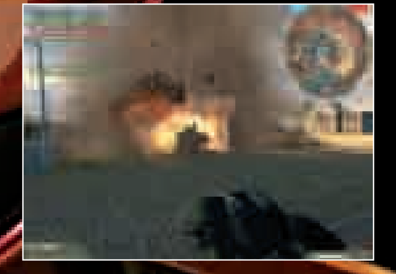
PAINKILLER

The same old game as before on **gamesTM03**? Well, not quite. Yes, we've kept *Painkiller* but we've also installed the new PK++ mod to keep things interesting. The pain level is still just as high as it ever was though…



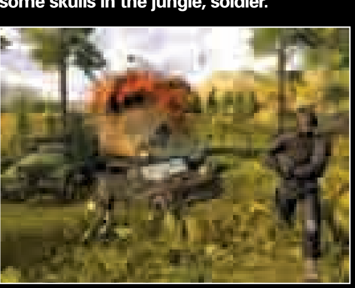
BATTLEFIELD 2

It shouldn't surprise you to learn that **gamesTM04** now plays host to our current favourite online game – just search for 213.208.119.130 in the game's IP browser, using **'crabbattle'** as your password to enlist in our ranks.



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

No change here, simply because you seem to be loving it so much. Advance And Secure remains the game on **gamesTM05**, so get out there and crack some skulls in the jungle, soldier.



Getting onto the **games**™ servers couldn't be easier – simply call up the available server list within any of the above games, find the relevant **games**™ gaming server and, providing the server isn't already full, click to enter. Our servers are still available to all with no restrictions and are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you have any problems or experience difficulty logging into the servers, just drop us a line at gamestm@paragon.co.uk, making sure that the words '**games**™ servers' are displayed clearly in the subject heading of your email.

JOLT ONLINE

The official **games**™ servers are provided by Jolt Online Gaming, the number-one gaming server provider in Europe. Jolt's servers have been seen by many as the benchmark in online gaming performance in Europe since 1999.

Jolt believes that online gaming is about more than just logging on to a random game server and playing with strangers. By fostering a strong relationship with its community and giving gamers places to hang out, Jolt has become host to one of the largest and most vibrant gaming communities in the world – you can join today by visiting http://forums.jolt.co.uk

Jolt also offers a variety of personalised game server packages catering for everyone from small clans looking for a private practice ground to large clans and organisations who want the prestige of their own branded and totally dedicated server boxes running multiple public game sessions with integrated admin tools, anti-cheat software and access to a dedicated support team. With prices starting at £12 a month, Jolt's servers are affordable to all. For more information visit www.jolt.co.uk



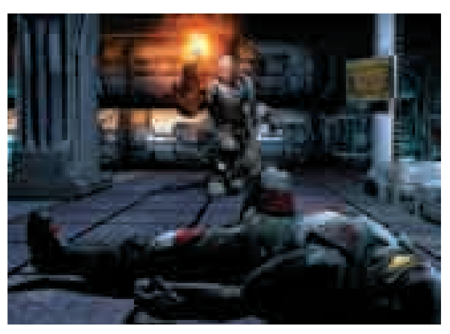
NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™

First arcade racing, now first-person shooting – is there any genre that Criterion doesn't think it can revolutionise? games™ gets ready to explore the FPS that offers gamers plenty more bang for their buck…

BLACK



NEXT MONTH

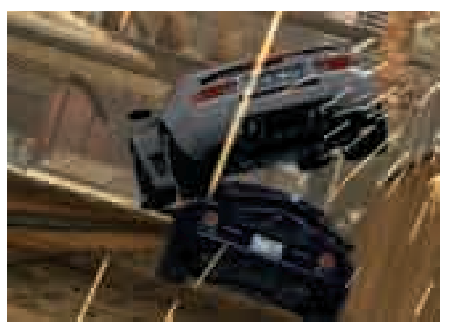


Not half as scary as *Doom 3* but certainly as pretty to look at – id's clearly onto a good thing.

MORE… PREVIEWS

Almost as you read this the Tokyo Game Show will be taking place so it's not exactly hard to guess that we'll be bringing you all the announcements and new titles from Japan's biggest gaming event of the year. On top of that though, you'll find the likes of *Quake IV*, *GTA: Liberty City Stories*, *Call Of Duty 2*, *Kingdom Hearts 2* and plenty more besides.

"QUAKE III ARENA'S MULTIPLAYER MEETS QUAKE II'S STORY – QUAKE IV HAS IT ALL"



Burnout 3 was the second game to score top marks in **games™** – will *Revenge* do the same?

MORE… REVIEWS

It's an issue of high-octane thrills and gun-toting spills next month, when the first of the Christmas '05 games fly onto the shelves. Between EA trying to delight us with all manner of *Burnout* (both *Revenge* and *Legends*), *Sniper Elite* and *Geist* taking pot shots at us, *Myst V* baffling our brains and *Castlevania* sucking our blood, it's going to be a busy few weeks…

"BURNOUT: REVENGE ONLY HAS TWO SETTINGS – FAST AND SMOKING WRECK"



There'll be plenty of ring-based puns in the next issue. Dare you tackle the Retro section?

MORE… RETRO

It's been some time coming but next issue's Retro goes a little lycra crazy as we bring you some top hardcore grappling action in the form of *Fire Pro Wrestling* and *Giant Gram*. Plus, a misty-eyed look back at the console disaster that was the 3DO, some long-awaited retro reviews (can you say *Taito Legends*?) and coverage of the UK's greatest retro show, CGEUK.

ON SALE 6 OCT 05

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

TODAY, I SAW the news that EA has gained the rights to publish *Half-Life 2* on Xbox. Immediately the comments began. You'd think the world was about to end with all the rubbish you read on forums about it. You know: EA is taking over the entire industry; EA is killing originality in games; EA drowns kittens in bags; generic EA comment #14.

What people seem to fail to notice is that EA is a business, and there are a few things that businesses need to do in order to survive, the main one, of course, being to make money. Why do they need to make money? Because if they don't then the shareholders get annoyed. They sell their shares. The shares become worthless. EA dies. A lot of people are made redundant. Next time you want to have a rant at EA, try blaming those people with shares rather than the EA staff; it's not their fault they have to do what they do!

I'm sure that everyone at EA, even up to the suits working at EA's head office on the moon (cheap rent, I hear), would love every game to be an utterly original concept. The fact is that people don't buy original games in their droves like people buy 'FIFA 2005 v1.4'. Look at the games Treasure makes, for example – I don't recall *Freak Out* bothering the top 40 for very long, if at all. When consumers start buying unique games, we'll see more originality. Is that going to happen? No. Is EA going to stop having to make money to survive? No. What can it do?

What about the good EA does for the industry? Sure, most of us can't stand the yearly *FIFA*s, but if it manages to sell a million extra PS2s to impressionable teenagers then where's the harm? The more people playing games, the more mainstream they become, the more originality we can get elsewhere.

And with that, I'm off to the department at EA that gives out brown paper envelopes stuffed with cash.

Matt Ingrey

Ah, but the problem is that gaming isn't a business to gamers – only to those who make the games. It's only natural that people who don't think of the bigger picture are going to tar companies like EA with the 'evil company' brush, especially when it's only those who take exception who tend to be the vocal types. The masses say nothing because the masses are happy, while the minority complain… it's a vicious circle. Oh, and that brown-envelope department's the third door on the left.

GAMES WILL HAVE evolved and how we play them will be different. The input and output methods will be beyond our current thinking and games will have fully embraced technology and the senses. In the future, we can create our own characters with as much or as little physical and emotional substance as we want. We can specify the geography, setting the terrain and the weather that affect our gameplay. We can determine the amount of players and non-players, the vehicles, the weapons, the tools. In the future there are no levels, no load times and no boundaries to play within.

Imagine a single game with an enemy so advanced that for every moment out of battle he's getting smarter, stronger, faster and more ruthless. And learning from your tactics, too. If I want to pursue him by air, by land, by sea I

"NEXT TIME YOU HAVE **A RANT ABOUT ELECTRONIC ARTS,** TRY BLAMING THE SHAREHOLDERS **RATHER THAN EA'S STAFF –** IT'S NOT THEIR FAULT **THEY DO WHAT THEY HAVE TO DO TO MAKE MONEY!"**

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with gamesTM. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

gamesTM, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

gamesTM reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **gamesTM**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…



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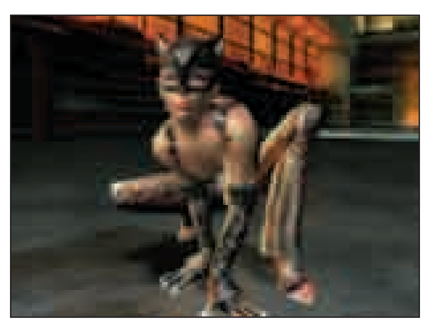
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Just because it has a wealth of repetitive franchises under its belt doesn't make EA the Earthly host of Beelzebub. Well, probably.



Making a great game seems to be within the grasp of developers, so why is it so hard to make a great movie-based videogame?

will have a choice of vehicle like in *Grand Theft Auto* to traverse the sprawling metropolis of my own making. I can customise it just like *Need For Speed* does or make the experience as in-depth as *Gran Turismo*. Or if I can't beat him with weapons, I can tackle him at sport instead. What about outscoring him with your Master League team from *Pro Evolution Soccer* or 'sacking' him into submission as you do in *Madden*?

With each new scenario, the system makes instant adjustments to the game mode, inventory and objectives. Suppose I travel by sea, I can dive to evade my pursuer or choose to explore the deep to hunt the wildlife for sport. If I leave the vehicle at the foot of a mountain I can choose to scale it using the inventory that's changed to reflect the new path my experience takes. And when I reach the summit, I can take to the skies and travel across the world like *Ace Combat*, even heading into space if I choose to continue my own version of *Elite*. Wherever I settle I can set up a city or a town or a business like *Civilisation* and in that I can develop the populations' characters like in *The Sims*.

And what if one of them turned nasty? Imagine a game with an enemy so advanced…
Karyl Alexander

You can dream, certainly. But then actually putting those dreams into reality is something that most developers can only dream of themselves. A game with that many concepts sounds impressive, but would it be technically possible? It's doubtful. That said, we don't doubt a day will come when such delights will be the norm, most likely once we're long dead and Sony's PlayStation5 (a machine twice as powerful as the human brain) has enslaved the world for its own evil ends. Maybe.

THANKS FOR THE feature on game-to-screen and screen-to-game conversions (issue 34). You're dead-on when you compare games to what comic books were 20 years ago. But as a screenwriter and avid gamer myself, I think that there's one thing missing from your article…

When cinema came into existence more than a hundred years ago it was merely amusement-park entertainment; pretty much what games were when they started out in arcades 35 years ago. And just like the literature scene of 1900 wouldn't touch a camera and start making movies, the movie scene of today is really too stuck up to lower itself to that guilty pleasure of gaming. 'Where's the Francis Ford Coppola of games?' it asks, completely missing the point. You cannot judge games by movies' standards and vice versa.

But it's a pity that the line between the two is still too seldom crossed (in both directions),



CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

why are there no games in the summer? i dont want to go outside!
gTM: But there are – you just aren't looking in the right place.

How does it feel to get paid to sit around playing games all day?
gTM: We'd tell you, but then we'd have to kill you. Slowly. With hammers.

I imported a PSP and there's been a van outside my house all day. I think Sony is coming to get me. Help!
gTM: Lock the doors, barricade the windows and pray they think you've moved to Australia. That's the only way.

perfect dark zero looks crap
gTM: You are aware that constructive criticism has to have a point, yes?

Spot on with the Killer 7 review. Best game of the summer.
gTM: Glad you approve – we are, after all, only here to please you.

battlefield 2 is to addictive. why did u make me buy it?
gTM: Don't blame us – blame the psychics at EA for forcing you to.

Am I the only one who thinks that Hot Coffee is the best thing about GTA?
gTM: Yes, we believe you are. No girlfriend, eh?

Please tell me that Chibi Robo is coming out in the UK. Missing out on Katamari was bad enough…
gTM: We wish we could, but it's not very likely. Still, there's always hope.

sony should thank the people making emulators for the psp because there's nothing else on it.
gTM: Apart from the 25 or so games out in the UK at the moment. Of course, if you'd have said there's nothing good on it…



Haven't bought *killer7* yet? Then we're not entirely sure we want to be friends with you any more. Sorry about that.



Internet cafés are so two years ago. We'd pay good money to see a proper gaming café (or even bar) open up somewhere.

because games could learn a lot from cinema – especially when it comes to story and character development – while the movies could use some fresh blood from all the incredible creative potential apparent in games.

Just like movies borrowed a lot from 19th Century novels to develop their narrative concepts, you don't have to reinvent the wheel for telling stories in games, and yet that's exactly what's happening. That's why we see weak dialogue, terrible cut-scenes and flat drama there. So please, dear game developers, ask some real writers to do that work, while please, dear film producers, ask someone who played the game you're adapting about what makes it so special after all – before you adapt it.

There's hope, though: Christophe Gans, the guy who beautifully adapted *Crying Freeman* from manga to film and gave us the wonder that is *Brotherhood Of The Wolf*, is directing the *Silent Hill* movie. I only hope he and screenwriter Roger Avary experienced the locker room scene in the original game all by themselves in a quiet, dark house…
Arne Sommer

Silent Hill certainly seems to be a step in the right direction for game-to-movie translations, but then, by the time everyone in Hollywood realises this Uwe Boll will most likely own the rights to every film-worthy videogame ever made. The question now has to be: who is it that keeps handing out our precious commodities to the man behind atrocities like *House Of The Dead* and *Alone In The Dark*? Ed Wood must be spinning in his grave…

WELL, AS THE fat lady clears her throat to announce the end of this generation, we finally have a game whose importance to this gen rivals that of the supremely influential *GTA III*. I'm talking of course about *killer7*, the game that has really given the punters crying out for more innovation a shot in the arm. Or leg. Or whichever limb is more likely to yield thick blood…

You see, *killer7* – for all its perceived faults – is an immensely important game. It's proof that there are genuine auteurs in the industry, even in this age of increasingly homogenous titles, inferior *GTA* clones, horrendous film tie-ins and generic FPS games. Sure, stripped down to its bare bones *killer7* is little more than a lightgun game with exploration and puzzle elements, but that would be like calling the equally unique *Psychonauts* a platformer. Here are two titles whose presentation is so comparatively abstract that they should be embraced by free-thinking gamers worldwide. Games where the line splitting style and substance is increasingly indistinct.

It's not just that dividing line that *killer7* has blurred either. Few interactive gaming



experiences have ever bridged the gap between 'art' and games quite like Suda 51's vision. Its plot and dialogue is of such subtlety and complexity that it puts many movies to shame. It's possibly the most mature mature game yet released, with the profanity, violence and sex mere window-dressing to some truly topical and remarkably prescient issues.

The idea of unseen 'walking bombs' in this current climate is tangibly unnerving, and the game is unafraid of discussing the likes of electoral vote-rigging in a bold, confrontational manner. Dig deep and you could find some genuinely controversial material in there, stuff that would have people more important than Jack Thompson foaming at the mouth, were they intelligent enough to spot it.

killer7 is much more than a game – it's a thought-provoking, intelligent and exciting piece of art that transcends its appeal as a very competent action-adventure; a game so much more than the sum of its parts. Congratulations for being one of the few publications to have the bollocks to rate it so highly.
Chris Schilling

To be frank, we were surprised that we were among one of only a few magazines to praise *killer7* – Capcom's unique effort is one of the most interesting titles of the year so far. Of course, whether the public sees it in the same light or ignores it in favour of 'Urban Action Shooter #6' is another matter entirely. Sadly, we suspect the latter. Damn them all to hell.

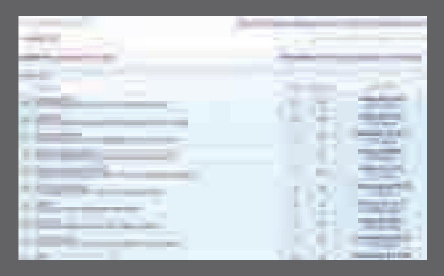
AS WE SHOULD all be well aware, the games industry has expanded to such a remarkable extent these past five years that it is now bigger than film – considerably bigger, in fact. However, film still has a major advantage over games in that the cinema is universally perceived as something social – you must get a gang of friends together or find a willing member of the opposite sex to accompany you.

Gaming, by contrast, is still a distinctly indoors activity, and though it is indeed very social, you tend only to play multiplayer with fellow gamers in your circle of friends. So why is there no such thing as a gaming club? A gaming café? I'm not talking cybercafés packed with teenagers all playing *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* against each other over the internet; I'm talking large, comfortable spaces with plentiful seating and large televisions, places that can charge admission – like the new sofa-graced play spaces that have started appearing in certain high-street stores, but on a larger scale. A place to try out new games, organise tournaments and meet like-minded people in person, rather than relying upon the internet as we are often prone to do.

Such establishments may well increase the reach of gaming. I seem to remember Sony enforcing a similar tactic by placing PlayStations in clubs and encouraging members of the public to play. Anyone fancy lending me the money to fund one?
Steve Griffith

Hmm… an interesting prospect, though we'd be wary of such a place turning into a hang-out for chav teenagers. Would there be some kind of dress code focusing on geek casual? Could we bring our imaginary girlfriends? These are things we must know – put them in a business plan and we'll get back to you.

"WHY IS THERE NO SUCH THING AS **A GAMING CLUB,** WITH PLENTIFUL SEATING AND LARGE TELEVISIONS **WHERE YOU CAN TRY OUT NEW GAMES, ORGANISE TOURNAMENTS OR MEET LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE** IN PERSON?"



FROM THE FORUM

WARNING! THIS GAME IS TOO HARD FOR YOU, LOSER!

redman
Should games carry difficulty ratings as well, like age ratings? I picked up a couple of copies of *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* for my nephews. But after playing it I'm a bit miffed – it's way too hard. They're eight and it's too hard for me! The content is fine but my nephews won't get past the first level to see it! Any thoughts on how to get around this? Like 'Age: 3+; Difficulty: you're f**ked!'?

retroman
Isn't this what magazine reviews are for?

RetroBob
Not a bad idea, redman. It's certainly feasible but not as cut-and-dried as age ratings. You mentioned that your nephews are eight, but the skill it takes to complete a game isn't determined by age.

redman
Yeah, I know, not cut-and-dried. But I think there should be some indication of how hard it is. Particularly those kinds of games where parents may grab a copy – like anything based on a cartoon. Perhaps the box could show joypads in various states of disrepair: happy unbroken joypad – easy; broken joypad with a boot stamping on it – hard.

Retrobob
Quality idea! My choice would be a fist thumping the arm of my armchair!

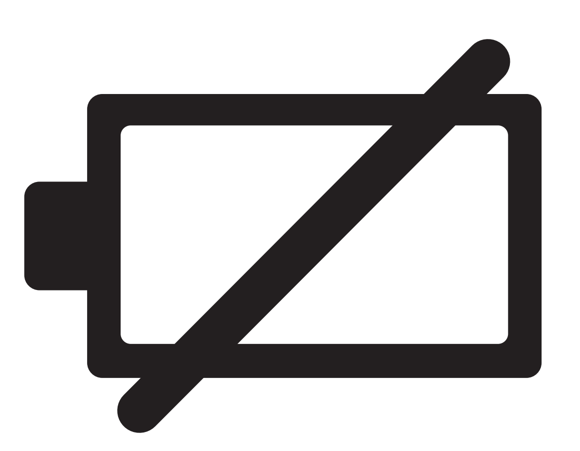
darthjim
Ninja Gaiden would need a piccy of a joypad being nuked. Then its remains fed to pirahnas.

Duffman
A system could work as long as the ratings aren't based on age. I would prefer something that goes along the lines of 'not for you if you are new to the genre' and 'great for genre beginners'.

CBx4
Depends on whether the game allows you to change the difficulty or not. A good percentage of them do these days, thankfully. What I don't like is misleading difficulties, like on *PN03* where Normal mode is actually ridiculously hard, and Easy is the equivalent of Normal.

Searly
All games need is multiple difficulty levels that are fairly graded (not like *Viewtiful Joe*, with Easy modes that are still too much for me). Even *Star Ocean 3* has easy/hard options.

Genji-Gloves
I think it's a good idea but I could see it affecting the sale of certain games. *Ninja Gaiden* and *DMC3* would have to have health warnings saying that you or your console could be damaged over long-term playing of the game.




gamesTM